

Octavio Paz and T. S. Eliot: A Literary Relation

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Abstract

This thesis applies a Reception Studies approach to the relationship between the works of T. S. Eliot and Octavio Paz. Although my introduction considers the influence theory of Harold Bloom and Julia Kristeva's 'intertextuality', it finds the methodology of Hans Robert Jauss a more appropriate model for the analysis of a literary relationship that spans two different languages and cultures.

The study is divided into two parts. Part One, 'Mexican Horizons', asks what were the translations that first introduced Paz to Eliot; and to which precursors and contemporaries in Mexico could Paz compare Eliot's work. Writers such as Ramón López Velarde and Salvador Novo, while unaware of Eliot, shared influences with him, and so created a context in which he could be understood. Paz also read Eliot as a counterpart to St.-John Perse, whose *Anabase* appeared in Spanish translation in the Mexican literary magazine, *Contemporáneos*, shortly after translations of *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*.

Part Two, '1930-1948', analyses Paz's use of Eliot in his own poems. It pays particular attention to the role that Eliot played in Paz's ambivalent relationship with the group of writers that contributed to *Contemporáneos*. Paz's own poems experience a constant struggle between scepticism and the assertion of pseudo-religious political belief. He makes use of Eliot on both sides of this struggle.

My conclusion takes Paz's last prose comments on Eliot as evidence of the final extent and limits of the relationship between the two authors. Paz continues to interrogate Eliot for conceptual expressions of belief, yet he acknowledges an experience of Eliot's poems which lies beyond the clarity of such formulations.

Three appendices supplement the reception history with accounts of Eliot's role in Paz's reading of surrealism, his first substantial work of poetic theory, *El arco y la lira*, and his later poems.

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Abbreviations

Works by Octavio Paz

<i>AOM</i>	<i>A la orilla del mundo y Primer día, Bajo tu clara sombra, Raíz del hombre, Noche de resurrecciones.</i>
<i>Arco1</i>	<i>El arco y la lira: el poema; la revelación poética; poesía e historia</i> (1 st edn, 1956).
<i>Arco2</i>	<i>El arco y la lira</i> (2 nd edn, 1967).
<i>ALP</i>	<i>Al paso.</i>
<i>BCS</i>	<i>Bajo tu clara sombra y otros poemas sobre España.</i>
<i>CA</i>	<i>Corriente alterna.</i>
<i>Corr</i>	<i>Correspondencia: Alfonso Reyes / Octavio Paz (1939-1959).</i>
<i>EPF</i>	<i>Entre la piedra y la flor.</i>
<i>‘Genealogía’</i>	<i>‘Genealogía de un libro: Libertad bajo palabra’,</i> interview with Anthony Stanton (1988).
<i>Hijos</i>	<i>Los hijos del limo: del romanticismo a la vanguardia.</i>
<i>In/med</i>	<i>In/mediaciones.</i>
<i>It</i>	<i>Itinerario.</i>
<i>LBP</i>	<i>Libertad bajo palabra</i> (1 st edn, 1949).
<i>LS</i>	<i>El laberinto de la soledad.</i>
<i>MyP</i>	<i>Memorias y palabras: Cartas a Pere Gimferrer 1966-1997.</i>
<i>‘NCA’</i>	<i>‘Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada’.</i>
<i>OC1, OC2</i>	<i>Obras completas, vol. 1, vol. 2 etc.</i>
<i>Ogro</i>	<i>El ogro filantrópico: historia y política 1971-1978.</i>
<i>OP</i>	<i>Obra poética (1935-1988).</i>
<i>OV</i>	<i>La otra voz.</i>
<i>‘Pasos’</i>	<i>‘Los pasos contados’.</i>
<i>PC</i>	<i>Pasión crítica.</i>
<i>Peras</i>	<i>Las peras del olmo.</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Primeras letras (1931-1943).</i>
<i>Puertas</i>	<i>Puertas al campo.</i>
<i>‘REM’</i>	<i>‘Rescate de Enrique Manguía’.</i>

<i>Solo</i>	<i>Solo a dos voces.</i>
<i>Sombras</i>	<i>Sombras de obras: Arte y literatura.</i>
<i>SyG</i>	<i>El signo y el garabato.</i>
<i>‘TSE’</i>	<i>‘T. S. Eliot’.</i>
<i>Vill</i>	<i>Xavier Villaurrutia en persona y en obra.</i>

Works by T. S. Eliot

<i>AOP</i>	<i>‘Introduction’ to <i>The Art of Poetry</i> by Paul Valéry.</i>
<i>ASG</i>	<i>After Strange Gods.</i>
<i>CPP</i>	<i>The Complete Poems and Plays.</i>
<i>IMH</i>	<i>The Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917.</i>
<i>KE</i>	<i>Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley.</i>
<i>LI</i>	<i>The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 1: 1898-1922.</i>
<i>MS VE</i>	<i>Private Collection, Mrs. Valerie Eliot, London.</i>
<i>‘MTP’</i>	<i>‘Modern Tendencies in Poetry’.</i>
<i>OPP</i>	<i>On Poetry and Poets.</i>
<i>SE</i>	<i>Selected Essays.</i>
<i>SW</i>	<i>The Sacred Wood.</i>
<i>TCC</i>	<i>To Criticize the Critic.</i>
<i>‘UOM’</i>	<i>‘Ulysses, Order, and Myth’.</i>
<i>UPUC</i>	<i>The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism.</i>
<i>VMP</i>	<i>The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry.</i>
<i>WLF</i>	<i>The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Draft of the Original Transcripts.</i>

A Note on Editions

In 1991 Octavio Paz's works began to appear in a series of *Obras completas* published by Círculo de Lectores in Spain and the Fondo de Cultura Económica in Mexico. Since the series was not complete when I embarked on my study, and since it is still available only patchily in British libraries, I have chosen to refer to the collections in which Paz's poetry and prose initially appeared. This decision is in part pragmatic but also methodological. My aim has been to trace the historical unfolding of Paz's relationship with Eliot and so I have attempted where possible to cite each of his works as evidence of his position at a particular moment. The *Obras completas* often incorporate later revisions which, while they may be a faithful record of the legacy that Paz wished to leave, represent a misleading combination of original impulse and retrospection for the literary historian. I have thus used the *Obras completas* for the occasional article that was not readily available in an earlier form and for the prologues that Paz provided for each volume, which are valuable evidence of his thinking in the last years of his career.

Introduction

Theories of Literary Relation

In 1988 the Ingersoll Foundation awarded Octavio Paz the T. S. Eliot Prize. Paz's acceptance speech, which was published in his own magazine, *Vuelta*, wastes little time over the formalities - acknowledging the worth of previous recipients, Borges, Ionesco, Naipaul - before striking a more confessional tone:

La circunstancia de que el Premio ostente el nombre del poeta angloamericano tiene para mí un alcance primordial, a un tiempo íntimo y simbólico. Es algo más que un premio: es una contraseña, un signo de pase. Era un adolescente cuando lo leí por primera vez y esa lectura me abrió las puertas de la poesía moderna.¹

That teenage discovery was made in the Mexican periodical *Contemporáneos*, which in 1930 published one of the first Spanish translations of *The Waste Land* - a prose version by Enrique Manguía Jr., titled 'El páramo'.² Paz describes the encounter in terms of ritual - 'un alcance primordial, a un tiempo íntimo y simbólico' - with the prize now 'una contraseña' or 'un signo de pase' - an initiation rite the other side of which was not adulthood so much as the world of modern poetry. Eliot, then, is closely bound to Paz's sense of his own self as poet. Yet just as initiation rites are traditionally traumatic events, Paz registers ambivalence. He recalls that as well as 'curiosidad' and 'seducción' he experienced 'azoro' ('TSE', 40); and in a separate article on Enrique Manguía, published in the same edition of *Vuelta*, he confesses that 'Eliot contradecía todo lo que yo pensaba que era *moderno* y todo lo que yo creía que era *poético*'.³ In spite of the impression that he made, Eliot did not fit straightforwardly into the world inhabited by the young Mexican poet, and Paz is open about the anxiety this generated. He talks about 'daring' eventually to read Eliot in English: 'finalmente, cuando progresé en el aprendizaje del inglés, me atreví a leerlo en su idioma original' ('TSE', 40). He

¹ 'T. S. Eliot', *Vuelta*, 142 (septiembre 1988), p. 40; a revised version, titled 'T. S. Eliot: mínima evocación' was reprinted in *Al paso* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1992), 17-23. I will quote from the original *Vuelta* version.

² *Contemporáneos*, 26-27 (julio-agosto 1930), 7-32. The very first translation, by Ángel Flores and titled *Tierra baldía* (Barcelona: Editorial Cervantes, 1930), appeared slightly earlier the same year.

³ 'Rescate de Enrique Manguía', *Vuelta*, 142 (septiembre 1988), p. 42. This article first appeared in *La letra y la imagen*, 46 (agosto 1980); a revised version also appeared in *AIP*, 23-26.

also expresses determined resistance to certain aspects of his forerunner: 'Mi fascinación ante *The Waste Land* nunca me hizo cerrar los ojos ante la incompatibilidad entre mis convicciones y las ideas y esperanzas que inspiran a ese poema' ('TSE', 41). Paz recalls his first reading of Eliot as decisive, yet nevertheless contradictory, both seduction and shock, promise and fear, acceptance and resistance. This rite of passage was no graceful admission to the world of modern poetry, and its fault lines run through Paz's ensuing career.

The most notorious theorist of such hostilities and contradictions bred by the influence of literary forebears is Harold Bloom. His first theoretical study, *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), has itself been read as heir to a slightly earlier work by Walter Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1971). Bate talks of 'an accumulating anxiety'⁴ of influence which, like Bloom, he views as a psychological phenomenon that becomes particularly acute towards the end of the eighteenth century. Their awareness of anxiety is promising for an exploration of the ambivalence and degree of trepidation that I have noted in the account that Paz gives of his initial response to Eliot. Their psychological approach also seems appropriate given the rhetoric of ritual - the physical enactment of a psychic event - that Paz employs. In spite of the resemblances, however, Bloom and Bate are driven by different preoccupations. Although Bate, citing an Egyptian scribe of 2000 B.C. who mourns that there is nothing left to say, sees intimidation from earlier writers as a perennial worry, he is most interested in the historical progression from neo-classical theory of the eighteenth century to the romantic period when an anxiety of influence presses with new urgency. He describes a considerable latitude in eighteenth-century concepts of imitation, and traces the process by which they gradually succumb to the burden imposed by a new exaltation of originality towards the end of the period. Although Bloom agrees, in *The Anxiety of Influence*, that the modern poet 'is the inheritor of a melancholy engendered in the mind of the Enlightenment',⁵ he has little patience for gradual historical process, and finds an individual, Descartes, on whom to blame the poet's anxiety. Once Descartes had separated mind as intensiveness from the world as extensiveness, poets could no longer be influenced by the stars, the outer world from which they were now isolated: 'Instead of the radiation of an aetherial fluid we received the poetic flowing in of an occult power exercised by humans, rather than by stars upon humans' (*Anxiety*,

⁴ *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), p. 3.

⁵ 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 8.

39). We must now seek influence from other minds, other poets, breeding an anxiety of competition. This shift of emphasis goes some way to close Bate's historical perspective, opening another. It allows Bloom to escape the restrictions of Bate's process, in which various conceptions of imitation and influence change their configuration over time, to a more clearly grasped moment in which an individual in possession of a single idea changes everything, cataclysmically. While the reference to Descartes does imply some concern for a historical succession of ideas, Bloom's rhetoric drives away from historical process to a mythical, atemporal fall from grace. In fact, when Bloom rejects Bate's choice of the late eighteenth century as a definable period for the birth of anxiety, in a later preface to his book (p. xxiv), the revision does very little to damage his theory, implying that history didn't contribute that much to it in the first place.

There is also considerable divergence in the psychological approach of the two books. For Bate, we suffer from a taboo on boldly facing up to what we admire and desire to imitate:

To reduce that taboo to size, to get ourselves out of this self-created prison, to heal or overcome this needless self-division, has been the greatest single problem for modern art. (*Burden*, 133)

This is a psychological problem that can be redeemed, it is even 'needless'. Bloom, for whom Freud's psychology 'is not severe enough' (*Anxiety*, 9), will allow no such optimism. The awful presence of what we admire, the precursor poet, and the anxiety generated by this presence, cannot be escaped - 'A poem is not an overcoming of anxiety, but is that anxiety' (p. 94). Where Bate's psychology is, for an aspiring poet, a malleable orientation towards the past, Bloom's is an unnegotiable given. Such an uncompromising view of the psychology at work provides Bloom with a clearly delineated premise from which he is able to elaborate a much more thorough taxonomy of the influence relation - his six revisionary ratios: *clinamen*, *tessera*, *kenosis*, *daemonization*, *askesis*, *apophrades* - than Bate can provide. Bloom is, then, a more cursory historian than Bate but, on the face of it at least, a sterner psychologist, one determined 'to de-idealize our accepted notions of how one poet helps to form another' (p. 5).

Bloom secures much of his credit on this de-idealizing claim, his revision of "humane letters" (p. 86) and his 'newer and starker way of reading poems' (p. 58). He

also gains credit for the appearance of system that his revisionary ratios exhibit. It is easy credit to secure within an academic community whose project aims to be both empirical and systematic. Any attempt in such an environment to challenge Bloom's severity will tend to sound like an evasion or an idealizing fudge. Jonathan Bate falls into just this trap when he tries to counter Bloom with the claim that 'the hope that one might be a descendant of a great poet may bring confidence instead of anxiety'.⁶ Bate's argument is not wrong so much as tactically naïve - his objection sounds all too hopeful in an environment that demands tough-mindedness. Lucy Newlyn senses this tactical weakness and happily uses Bloom's authority as a stick to beat her peers. For Newlyn, Bate's and Edwin Stein's attempts to portray influence as a benign rather than an anxious relation lead them to 'replace Bloom's pugnaciously attractive system of revisionary ratios with value judgements and personal testimonials'.⁷ Bloom's revisionary ratios are indeed attractive, and they are a genuine heuristic contribution to the reading of literary relations. Paz's objection, which I cited earlier, to the 'ideas y esperanzas' that inspired *The Waste Land* could be explained as both *clinamen*, a misreading of Eliot, and *tessera*, an explicative completion of a lacuna in the precursor's vision. To follow Bloom thus, however, one must make large assumptions about the ways that Paz generates his work out of the relationship with Eliot. The Bloomian reading is predicated on a belief that any difference between Paz and Eliot is necessarily an evasion, rather than a more straightforward allegiance to the practice of other writers. Paz's 'convicciones' react against Eliot rather than conforming to particular groups that were active in 1930s Mexico. Critics commonly get round the limitations of this perspective by employing Bloom's terminology without pressing the theory of evasion too hard that underpins it. This practice excuses Bloom's theory the rigour of close examination but also does his theoretical ambition, which is considerable, a disservice. He declares at the outset that his book offers not merely a theory of influence but 'a theory of poetry by way of a description of poetic influence' (*Anxiety*, 8). He does not intend the ratios to stand alone; in fact, although each of the main chapters carries the name of one of the ratios, the actual discussion of the ratio itself often seems absent-mindedly appended to the end, as if other considerations were more pressing. I cannot, then, apply these ratios casually, as I have just done above, without asking myself how far I am prepared to follow the project of which they are a part.

⁶ *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 2.

⁷ *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 14.

This project is the de-idealizing by which Bloom aims to undermine our cherished notions of creative collaboration between poets, the dignity of literary tradition:

The main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, wilful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist. (p. 30)

The coincidence of Bloom's central theme with his most hectoring writing is typical. A reader hoping to arrive at a clear understanding of his theory may feel disoriented by a rhetoric that can jump so readily from awe at 'the terrible splendor of cultural heritage' (p. 32) to contempt for 'the squalor of our timeless human fear of mortality' (p. 58). Bloom's ambition is doubtless prophetic, but he can often sound simply rumbustious. The bluster of 'various fiercenesses' (p. 33), 'enormous curtailment' (p. 125) and 'fearful strength' (p. 131), and the martial drama of art 'menaced by greater art' (p. 70) and 'the ephebe wrestling with and *daemonizing* the past' (p. 109) border perilously on caricature. One can easily become sidetracked in an attack on Bloom's style. Frank Lentricchia finds the temptation irresistible, referring to Bloom's 'self-revealing pique' and 'irritation' before informing the reader mischievously that in *Poetry and Repression* Bloom's rhetoric is 'employed without mercy'.⁸ By the end of his account, however, he has repented and, while he holds Bloom's faulty presentation partly responsible for some of the theory's more hostile reception, he concludes that 'the problems of the theory are not so much problems of principle as they are of tone, rhetoric, and scope' (p. 343). As Bill Nye said of Wagner, it is better than it sounds. Is principle so easily separable, however, from the rhetoric that expresses it? Bloom asserts, for example:

If the imagination's gift comes necessarily from the perversity of the spirit, then the living labyrinth of literature is built upon the ruin of every impulse most generous in us. (*Anxiety*, 85)

He does not simply confront the reader with a case of off-putting hyperbole but with uncertainty about what is being said. Bloom gives two different ruins. One is a static place, a foundation proposed by the metaphor 'built upon the ruin of...'. This metaphor is undone, however, as the sentence continues with 'the ruin of every impulse most generous...'. Now the reader has not a place but the act of ruining. In terms of principle,

⁸ *After the New Criticism* (London: Athlone Press, 1980), pp. 319-20 & 339.

this single example is not decisive, but it reveals the psychological drama that underpins Bloom's theory, his constant need to shatter ideals farther and faster - not enough that something should already be a ruin; it must be ruined in the reader's presence, ruined again. Coherent exposition is overwhelmed by the polemical impulse. Newlyn preferred Bloom's system to 'value judgements and personal testimonials', yet his system betrays a dubiously personal basis.

This personal, psychological drama sustains Bloom's de-idealizing project, carrying it beyond any clear-sighted uncovering of superstition. The term 'de-idealizing', in fact, flatters a more hostile and insecure response to his subject. In itself this might not be a problem, simply a matter of shaky rhetoric not principle; but such restless denigration does usually operate in the service of some back-door ideal. With Bloom this is the precursor who has replaced God: 'The Protestant God, insofar as He was a person, yielded His paternal role for poets to the blocking figure of the Precursor' (p. 152). Bloom places the imaginative vision of precursor poets out of reach; for all the misreadings of latecomers, their achievements stand entire. Paul de Man is sympathetic to this claim and states that Bloom has rejected the imagination-nature dualism adopted by Geoffrey Hartman in favour of 'asserting the absolute power of the imagination to set norms for aesthetic, ethical and epistemological judgement'.⁹ De Man continues that such a view of the imagination moves beyond the categories where nature and critical rhetoric normally operate. Thus, 'in this difficult philosophical predicament, Bloom's perhaps unconscious strategy has been to reach out for a new definition of the imagination by means of near-extravagant overstatement' (p. 270). Yet Bloom has not found a new category so much as idealized an old one - the poetic imagination, which now sets its own norms. For de Man, Bloom is exploring new territory, yet the emotional range of Bloom's exposition is curiously monotonous. This is the insidious effect of any idealization; it forecloses response to the particularity of the not-ideal. The reader is thus forced to contemplate an obsessional battle in which a supposedly idealizing humanism is denigrated in the name of an imagination which has itself become an ideal. Bloom's polemic is ultimately self-defeating.

Michael Baxandall, in a much quoted 'Excursus against influence', bemoans:

'Influence' is a curse of art criticism primarily because of its wrong-headed grammatical prejudice about who is the agent and who the patient: it seems to

⁹ 'Review of Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*', in *Blindness and Insight*, 2nd edn (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 269.

reverse the active/passive relationship which the historical actor experiences and the inferential beholder will wish to take into account. If one says that X influenced Y it does seem that one is saying that X did something to Y rather than that Y did something to X. But in the consideration of good pictures and painters the second is always the more lively reality [...] If we think of Y rather than X as the agent, the vocabulary is much richer and more attractively diversified: draw on, resort to, avail oneself of, appropriate from, have recourse to, adapt, misunderstand, refer to, pick up, take on, engage with, react to, quote, differentiate oneself from, assimilate oneself to, assimilate, align oneself with, copy, address, paraphrase, absorb, make a variation on, revive, continue, remodel, ape, emulate, travesty, parody, extract from, distort, attend to, resist, simplify, reconstitute, elaborate on, develop, face up to, master, subvert, perpetuate, reduce, promote, respond to, transform, tackle... - everyone will be able to think of others.¹⁰

Bloom's scheme has been similarly criticized for denying the agency of the influenced author, and for ceding all power to the precursor. Yet he resists Baxandall's criticism. Bloom does give agency to the influenced poet; his theory is one of revision, and the shower of revisionary terms that Baxandall offers would make a helpful supplement to Bloom's own ratios. Yet a significant difference remains between the specific focus of their two approaches. Baxandall wishes to direct attention to the agency of the later artist (or writer), for him 'the more lively reality'. It is not an easy focus to maintain, and he concedes that to talk of influence at all threatens his enterprise, concluding: 'influence I do not want to talk about' (p. 62). Bloom's ratios also focus on the agency of the later writer, or 'ephebe' as he describes him or her; but this focus gives way to a further perspective that results from his idealization of the poetic imagination, or vision, which is then made the possession of a few precursor poets, such as Milton and Keats. The ephebe can revise the precursor endlessly, but he or she still depends upon a vision that the precursor has already possessed. In order to gain access to that vision the ephebe must not court influence, therefore, so much as identify with the precursor. Thus, in the revisionary success stories of Bloom's final chapter, '*Apophrades* or the Return of the Dead', influenced poets do not reach a form of individuation, but 'achieve a style that captures and oddly retains priority over their precursors, so that the tyranny of time almost is overturned, and one can believe, for startled moments, that they are being *imitated by their ancestors*' (*Anxiety*, 141). Bloom insists on an identity between poets in which the position of authority is reversible. Yet identification does not account for the whole of the influence relation; it is one aspect of it. Bloom's confusion is

¹⁰ *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 58-9.

widespread, and when Richard Sieburth aims for a broader understanding of the literary relationship between Ezra Pound and Remy de Gourmont he is forced to plead a stance outside conventional influence studies:

In relating Gourmont to Pound the intention has been to elicit affinities rather than stress debts, for Gourmont did not influence Pound in the usual sense of the term: he provided, both by his personal example and his works, something far more important - a range of instigations, a series of incitements to experiment and discovery.¹¹

Sieburth's concept of 'instigations' - the interests, such as Flaubert's prose style, that Pound discovered through Gourmont - is much closer to the influence that one might say a teacher has exerted, when one doesn't mean that one tried to be like him or her. This approach can take my study beyond Bloom's jurisdiction to understand the ways that Eliot's influence manifests itself variously in Paz's work without betraying a constant identification of the later with the earlier poet. Sieburth offers an awareness that connections between works cannot always be reduced to a head-on battle for priority of vision.

Bloom's theory never escapes its confusion of identification with influence. The confusion is essential, in fact, to facilitate the 'blocking' figure of the precursor (*Anxiety*, 99), and to argue, as the ratio of *Apophrades* argues, that all poets, in spite of their self-saving pretence to the contrary, are writing the same poem. Yet Bloom does not offer the only possible view of the way that literary texts communicate from one generation to another. In his short story 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote' Jorge Luis Borges offers a different model. The story's narrator quotes a passage from Cervantes that begins 'La verdad, cuya madre es la historia...', and which he describes as 'un mero elogio retórico de la historia'. He then quotes an identical passage written by Menard in the twentieth century and concludes:

La historia, *madre* de la verdad; la idea es asombrosa. Menard, contemporáneo de William James, no define la historia como una indagación de la realidad sino como su origen.¹²

Where Bloom argues that later writers cannot escape earlier ones, Borges suggests the opposite, that in fact the later writer cannot even copy a precursor: the different context

¹¹ *Instigations* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 26.

¹² *Obras completas*, vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1989), p. 449.

has changed the work. Bloom must attenuate the tendency of a changing context to change meaning; otherwise the relationship between precursor, text and the meaning of that text becomes over-complicated. Thus he argues that modernism still operates within the context of romanticism rather than exploring the complex affinities and discontinuities that span the two periods. Wallace Stevens doubtless earns such high praise from Bloom since he accommodates this scheme. The more awkward case of Eliot's ambivalent relation to the romantic poets is barely explored by Bloom who, in a separate essay, impatiently forces him into 'the main Romantic tradition of British American poetry' as if that were the final word on the matter.¹³

Bloom must insist upon continuity between authors of a single tradition in order to maintain his vision of influence as identification. He chooses his authors judiciously to this end, and with troublesome cases like Eliot he is not averse to a bit of trimming to get an acceptable fit. However, a theory that is already overstretched coping with the relationship between a select handful of romantic and modernist authors can hardly be expected to comprehend the relationship between Paz and Eliot – two authors from different countries and languages. Borges's short story challenges Bloom's theory by drawing attention to the way that a temporal transposition will change the meaning of a literary text. Although the temporal distance between Paz and Eliot is not so great – their writing careers involve a considerable overlap – the cultural and linguistic transposition that Eliot's works undergo in order to become available to Paz is inescapable. Paz does not read Eliot within 'the main Romantic tradition of British American poetry', nor even within Anglo-American modernism, but in relation to a whole range of writers from competing traditions: Mexicans such as Ramón López Velarde, Carlos Pellicer, Salvador Novo and Xavier Villaurrutia; theorists of *Poesía pura*, such as Juan Ramón Jiménez and Paul Valéry; and Arthur Rimbaud, St.-John Perse and Pablo Neruda as variously experimental writers. This picture is further complicated by the influence of the French symbolists on Spanish American *modernismo*, which alerted Mexican writers to Eliot's own affinities with writers such as Jules Laforgue and Stéphane Mallarmé.

Eliot's presence is not so much 'blocking' as negotiable in relation to a number of other presences. Quite frequently, in fact, he provides Paz with an allegiance that can buy some distance from more pressing influences within Mexico. One could say that

¹³ 'Reflections on T. S. Eliot', *Raritan*, 8 (Fall 1988), p. 70.

Eliot is one presence among many, but his presence is not even single. Paz first gets to know Eliot through a number of different translations and introductions. Paz's Eliot is therefore a multiple, textual presence: he is the author of Enrique Manguía's 'El páramo' (1930), then of Ángel Flores's *Tierra baldía* (1930), of Rodolfo Usigli's 'El canto de amor de J. Alfred Prufrock' (1938), and of Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano's 'Miércoles de ceniza' (1938). Frequently, these translations are produced by writers with their own reputation, which further erodes Eliot's single identity in favour of a dialogue that involves complex mediation. The Mexican tradition that Eliot enters becomes less a matter of awful presences than of chinese whispers. Eliot simply doesn't have a single identity upon which to construct a Bloomian idealization of his imaginative vision. Geoffrey Hartman, in a critique of Bloom's theory, identifies this slippage as a characteristic of all literary traditions. He pleads for an acknowledgement of the indirections by which tradition moves, and asserts the

concept of *error* which Bloom narrows to misprision. Error formally separates a beginning and an end: it determines the narratable line, or process of discovery, as a wonder-wandering that is valuable in itself rather than being merely a delayed, catastrophic closure.¹⁴

This 'wonder-wandering' is an inescapable aspect of Paz's relationship to Eliot.

Hartman's critique of Bloom is broadly deconstructive; it challenges the idea of precursor-as-origin, and aims to celebrate openness and play in literary relations rather than closure. One would then expect Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, itself born from a reading of Derrida and Lacan, to provide a workable alternative to the theory of influence formulated by Bloom. In 'Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman' Kristeva declares:

Tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte. A la place de la notion d'intersubjectivité s'installe celle d'*intertextualité*, et le langage poétique se lit, au moins, comme *double*.¹⁵

The metaphor of a mosaic appears promising for the approach I favour, in which the one-to-one agon of Bloom is replaced with a more various configuration of Eliot in relation to the other influences that were available to Paz. Yet Kristeva's metaphor

¹⁴ *The Fate of Reading and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 50.

¹⁵ *Critique*, 23, 239 (avril 1967), pp. 440-1.

implies more, or rather less, than this. While it clearly aims to break down the idea of a monolithic text in favour of a fragmentary discourse, it nevertheless suggests a markedly inert relationship between the 'citations' that comprise the literary text. In a mosaic the relationships between parts are fixed, and they have little autonomous function; the parts serve the whole. It is difficult to see what kind of dialogue, or negotiation, would occur between the different 'quotations' of a text that behaved according to this analogy, or how they might resist the intention of the mosaic's constructor. I have myself used the metaphor of dialogue here, and the related metaphor of negotiation, in an attempt to suggest a dynamic and motivated relationship between part and whole within a text. This metaphor is Mikhail Bakhtin's, and in fact Kristeva's theory of intertextuality is formulated as both an explication and a revision of Bakhtin's writings on dialogism. The revision attempts to marry Bakhtin with her theoretical peers in France. She thus aims to excise the notion of authorial agency that 'dialogue' implies in favour of 'textuality'. For Kristeva's Bakhtin,

issu d'une Russie révolutionnaire préoccupée de problèmes sociaux, le dialogue n'est pas seulement le langage assumé par le sujet, c'est une *écriture* où on lit *l'autre* (sans aucune allusion à Freud). Ainsi, le dialogisme bakhtinien désigne l'écriture à la fois comme subjectivité et comme communicativité ou, pour mieux dire, comme *intertextualité*; face à ce dialogisme, la notion de "personne-sujet de l'écriture" commence à s'estomper pour céder la place à une autre, celle de "l'ambivalence de l'écriture". (pp. 443-4)

Kristeva's exposition shifts confusingly between a Bakhtin that she wishes explicitly to revise, and a Bakhtin that she has already surreptitiously revised so that she can claim his authority to validate her own opinions. At one stage she refers repeatedly to Bakhtin's 'mot' but qualifies it with the Derridean 'texte' in parentheses (p. 440). However, by the end of the passage quoted above (which also concludes a section of her argument) it is clear that Kristeva has deserted the dual vision of writing 'à la fois comme subjectivité et comme communicativité' which she attributes to Bakhtin in favour of "l'ambivalence de l'écriture".

Kristeva aims for a clearly defined position in the debate between subject-centred and language-centred theories of writing. Harold Bloom jumps roundly onto the opposite scale and in *A Map of Misreading* (1975), his follow-up to *The Anxiety of Influence*, pronounces upon the folly of continental theory. Seemingly careless of his earlier role as anti-humanist de-idealizer, he bewails 'the great humanistic loss' we

sustain if we yield ‘to those like Derrida and Foucault who imply [...] that language by itself writes the poems and thinks’.¹⁶ ‘Influence remains subject-centered, a person-to-person relationship, not to be reduced to the problematic of language’ (p.77), he insists.

I have already remarked that Bloom’s approach is cavalier about the textual aspect of influence, particularly with regard to the relationship that obtains between Paz and Eliot, in which translation is such an important factor. Does this mean that instead of his ‘person-to person’ scheme my study should adopt Kristeva’s “‘l’ambivalence de l’écriture’”? I am uncomfortable with such a tidy opposition, not least because Paz and Eliot occupy both sides of it. Both poets owed much to the symbolist tradition exemplified by Stéphane Mallarmé’s description in ‘Crise de vers’ of ‘L’oeuvre pure’ which ‘implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l’initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés’; yet they also preserved a belief, however compromised, in some authorial intention, and in the poem as a register of speech rather than mere *écriture*.¹⁷ Paz’s ambivalence is typified by the statement that for his generation ‘el lenguaje era, simultánea y contradictoriamente, un destino y una elección. Algo dado y algo que hacemos. Algo que nos hace’.¹⁸ One might conclude that both poets are guilty of theoretical inconsistency, but at the outset of a study it is more prudent to assume that both the subject-centred and the language-centred aspects of their work deserve attention.

Much of the drama of the post-romantic lyric derives from an open awareness of the competing claims of subjectivity and language. Bloom and Kristeva are impatient to close this debate and so offer blunt instruments for the study I propose. Kristeva’s theory, like Bakhtin’s before her, displays little interest in the lyric poem as a form with specific preoccupations and ways of operating. Michael Worton and Judith Still acknowledge that Kristeva has been criticized ‘on the grounds that the literary examples which she cites are too particular and even inappropriate for her argument’, although they conclude that ‘the importance of Kristeva’s work is not so much her reading of particular poets, or even of particular poetic genealogies, as her formulation of a theory

¹⁶ *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 60.

¹⁷ Mallarmé, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Bordas, 1992), p. 276. For Paz’s hostility to the preference of the *Nouvelle Critique* for *écriture* over the spoken word see *Solo a dos voces* (Barcelona: Lumen, 1973), p. 71: ‘En un principio la literatura fue hablada y fue oída, no leída [...] Y ahora entramos en una época en la cual han aparecido nuevas formas de comunicación. De ahí que resulte extraña la preeminencia de la noción de *escritura* en Francia.’

¹⁸ *Los hijos del limo* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1974; 5th edn, 1998), p. 209.

of the subject and of language'.¹⁹ Her reputation as a theorist is secured at the expense of any meaningful claims for the efficacy of her 'intertextuality' as a tool in the study of specific literary relations.

Like the Bakhtin that it revises, Kristeva's theorizing is not concerned with the lyric poem as a specific form; nor does she demonstrate a clear grasp of the ways that literary forms change over time. Her energy is directed towards a general theory of language which can apply to all forms of writing. As I have argued, although a poetry specialist, Harold Bloom also displays a patchy sense of literary history, which is more mythical than strictly historical. Walter Jackson Bate offers the benefit of an approach which recognizes that conceptions of poetic influence have changed over time, and that those changing conceptions in turn affect the relations themselves between writers. In the light of this awareness, it seems pertinent to consider briefly some of the attitudes that Paz and Eliot express towards literary influence. Bate is in fact doubly relevant, since his interest in neo-classical theory applies to the symbolist inheritance of Eliot and Paz which was itself polemicized by Eliot as a return to 'classicism' after the romantic period. Both neo-classicism and symbolism share a heightened awareness of literary form. Edgar Allan Poe's seminal polemic 'The Philosophy of Composition' (1846), which declared that the author had decided upon the refrain 'nevermore' for 'The Raven' not for its meaning but because it contained 'the long *o* as the most sonorous vowel, in connection with *r* as the most producible consonant' is not wholly alien to John Dryden's praise for Thomas Creech's translation of Manilius in which 'the many liquid consonants are placed so artfully'.²⁰

In a revealing passage in the prologue to the volume of his *Obras completas* that contains his earliest poems, Paz describes his poetic apprenticeship with direct reference to Aristotle and a neo-classical vocabulary of 'imitation':

El hombre, decía Aristóteles, es imitador por naturaleza y el aprendizaje comienza con la imitación. Sin ella, serían inexplicables todas las vocaciones pues ¿de dónde viene el llamado sino de un movimiento anímico que nos lleva a emular e imitar al que admiramos? [...] Nos identificamos con aquello que admiramos y entonces brota el deseo de imitación. Por la imitación nos apropiamos de los secretos del hacer [...] Todos los escritores y autores comienzan imitando; todos, si tienen talento, convierten sus imitaciones en invenciones. Los poetas, sin

¹⁹ *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 17.

²⁰ Edgar Allan Poe, *Poems and Essays on Poetry* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), p. 143; Rainer Schultze and John Biguenet, eds., *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 25.

excluir a los más grandes, recurren sin cesar a la tradición y en sus obras se encuentran siempre pasajes que son tejidos de alusiones a las obras del pasado. Lo sorprendente es que esas alusiones se transforman en algo nuevo y nunca oído [...] La originalidad es hija de la imitación.²¹

Paz mentions identification as a part of the process of learning from a previous writer. However, he does not allow this one aspect of the process to stand for the whole; nor is Paz's identification so purely a psychological phenomenon, a 'person-to-person' relationship, as in Bloom. We identify with 'aquello', 'what' we admire not 'whom'. Paz coincides with Bloom but also thinks beyond him. His claim that 'la originalidad es hija de la imitación' attempts to marry Jackson Bate's neo-classical influence as imitation with the later romantic concept of originality that interests Bloom.

Paz shares an awareness with Eliot that form is related to a poet's vision, but not, as in Bloom, reducible to it. In 'What Dante Means to Me' (1950), one of his major meditations on influence, Eliot refers to a poet's early influences:

Such early influences, the influences which, so to speak, first introduce one to oneself, are, I think, due to an impression which is in one aspect, the recognition of a temperament akin to one's own, and in another aspect the discovery of a form of expression which gives a clue to the discovery of one's own form. These are not two things, but two aspects of the same thing.²²

Eliot recognizes the affinity of temperament at work in influence which Paz describes as 'adhesión'. He also acknowledges, like Paz, that the process involves a 'form of expression' which is distinct from, although related to, the temperament that is being expressed. Paz's own thoughts about influence were undoubtedly themselves influenced by Eliot. His reference, in the prologue quoted above, to 'pasajes que son tejidos de alusiones a las obras del pasado' immediately brings *The Waste Land* to mind. Paz referred freely to the writers that had inspired his work, a practice that was probably encouraged by Eliot's own openness about influence.

Eliot's notorious assertion in 'Phillip Massinger' (1920) that 'immature poets imitate; mature poets steal' provides a licence for poets to parade their literary sources.²³ Bloom describes Eliot's statement as a 'shibboleth' (*Anxiety*, 31), although he might just as easily have interpreted its aggressiveness as a symptom of anxiety, and thus as

²¹ *Obras completas*, vol. 13: *Miscelánea I: Primeros escritos* (México: FCE, 1999), p. 16.

²² *To Criticize the Critic and other writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 126.

²³ *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920; 2nd edn, 1928; London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p. 105.

confirmation of his theory. Bloom's theory of influence experiences its own anxieties when confronted with an Eliot that anticipates its broadest perspectives. Bloom is happy to cite the Borges of 'Kafka y sus precursores' (1951) more than once - 'cada escritor *crea* a sus precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro' -²⁴ yet he fails to acknowledge that in a footnote Borges refers this observation back to Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919): 'what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art that preceded it' (*SW*, 41).

Paz shares Eliot's insight that the present interprets the past from its own interest, and he makes it the guiding principle of his anthology of twentieth-century Mexican poetry: 'la modernidad construye su pasado con la misma violencia con que edifica su futuro'.²⁵ Following the logic of Eliot and Borges, he reads the chronology of literary history in reverse: 'Si el presente es un comienzo, la obra de Pellicer, Villaurrutia y Novo es la consecuencia natural de la poesía de los jóvenes y no a la inversa' (p. 7).²⁶ Paz anticipates Bloom's ratio of *Apophrades*, in which the ephebe appears to influence the precursor. However, Paz doesn't lock the two generations into an identity where either one or the other claims the position of authority. Their works are not the same; they can be read as engendering each other whilst maintaining discrete identities. He also anticipates Bloom's understanding of influence as a revisionary relationship in his pronouncement that 'la tradición moderna es la tradición de la ruptura' (p. 5). Paz indicates that the broadest outlines of Bloom's thought are indebted to Eliot and that they can be adopted without accepting Bloom's polemic that all poems are based upon an essential sameness of vision.

Poesía en movimiento describes a flexible literary tradition that can be negotiated by an aspiring poet. Eliot often coincides more nearly with Bloom in a recognition that some influences are insurmountable:

Milton made a great epic impossible for succeeding generations; Shakespeare made a great poetic drama impossible; such a situation is inevitable, and it persists

²⁴ Borges, vol. 2, 90. See *Anxiety*, 19 & 141.

²⁵ *Poesía en movimiento. México, 1915-1966* (México: Siglo XXI, 1966), p. 6.

²⁶ Paz was also aware of Borges and echoes him directly in *Hombres en su siglo y otros ensayos* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1984), p. 104: 'cada generación inventa a sus autores'; see also *La otra voz* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1990), p. 102: 'La mayoría de los poetas escogen a sus antepasados: Eliot a los "poetas metafísicos" y a Laforgue...'

until the language has so altered that there is no danger, because no possibility, of imitation.²⁷

Bloom would approve of Eliot's choice of personnel. Yet Eliot also admits Borges's insight that time will change the reader's relation to the work, and will attenuate its presence. He demonstrates an ambivalent attitude towards this process: 'no danger' is clearly positive, yet the appended 'no possibility' implies that something has been lost as well as gained. In an early essay, 'Modern Tendencies in Poetry', which was intended as a companion to 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Eliot stated that 'the capacity of appreciating poetry is inseparable from the power of producing it, it is poets themselves who can best appreciate poetry. Life is always turned toward creation; the present only, keeps the past alive'.²⁸ For Bloom, the aspiring poet's problem lies in escaping the awful presence of past. Eliot, with a keener sense of loss, sees an effort in keeping the past alive. I have already commented on Bloom's carelessness of historical process in comparison with Walter Jackson Bate. The comparison with Eliot suggests that, in spite of his de-idealizing claims, Bloom's ahistorical vision is also reluctant to accept the experience of loss which pervades Eliot's work.

When Eliot described a time in which the presence of Shakespeare and Milton would be diminished he was projecting a long way into the future, an indication of just how persistent the elegiac strain of his thinking could be. His own experience felt their presence:

When I was young I felt much more at ease with the lesser Elizabethan dramatists than with Shakespeare: the former were, so to speak, playmates nearer my own size. (TCC, 127)

The strongest precursors could not be challenged, and so Eliot avoided them. He could find playmates nearer his own size, or seek out authors whose distance, whether temporal or linguistic, left 'no danger, because no possibility, of imitation'. His assertion in 'Phillip Massinger' in fact ends, 'A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest' (SW, 106). It is perhaps Eliot's willingness to evade battles with the strongest precursors that most irks Bloom. However, the distance that Eliot describes between the two authors of the influence relation applies more closely to the case of Paz and Eliot than does Bloom's

²⁷ *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 150.

²⁸ *Shama'a*, 1, 1 (April 1920), p. 12.

extended romantic tradition. Eliot's pragmatism vexes Bloom's theory but it provides useful insights into the mechanics of influence. He contradicts Bloom's insistence on the individual strong figure – one finds in poetry as in science that 'when a new discovery is made, it has been preceded by a number of scattered investigators who have happened to be groping [...] in the same direction' (*TCC*, 58) – and also Bloom's need for a poet to challenge the precursor's main achievement – 'there are the poets from whom one has learned some one thing, perhaps of capital importance to oneself, though not necessarily the greatest contribution these poets have made' (*TCC*, 126). Eliot ducks the fight, which denies him the status of strong poet within the Bloomian scheme, but this need not disqualify him, nor Paz either, who displays an equally pragmatic attitude to literary borrowing, from a less peremptory attention.

Both Eliot and Paz share an awareness of the ways that writers will manipulate the past to suit their current interest. They both looked to writers that could serve the historical moment in which they found themselves. For Eliot, it was Laforgue who 'showed how, [*sic*] much more use poetry could make of contemporary ideas and feelings, of the emotional quality of contemporary ideas, than one had supposed' ('MTP', 13); and for Paz this role was frequently supplied by Eliot. Both Bloom and Kristeva fail to account, in their different ways, for this understanding of influence as a relation that occurs in a given historical moment. Neither Paz nor Eliot is as systematic a thinker about the influence relation as these two theorists, yet their insights are more various and more attentive to the practicalities of poetic production than either the coiner of the 'revisionary ratios' or of 'intertextuality'. I had hoped that theories of influence and intertextuality would suggest an approach that could help me develop certain scattered observations towards a coherent understanding of the relationship between Paz and Eliot. Neither Bloom nor Kristeva provide much room, however, for the specific circumstances of a relationship between two authors of different countries and languages. In fact, their grasp of the specific details that are the basis of any literary relationship is weakened by their need to make their insights answer to a general philosophical ambition. Without a broad theory or method, however, which can structure my own observations, my study risks the twin dangers of either a meaningless objectivism – listing the appearances of Eliot in the manner of a positivist source study, the 'wearisome industry of source-hunting' as Bloom calls it (*Anxiety*, 31) – or unmediated subjectivism – simply reading my own interests and preoccupations into the coincidences between Paz's and Eliot's work. When Christopher Ricks produced notes

for his edition of T. S. Eliot's early poems he tried 'to put down only the parallels [...] and to leave it to the reader to decide what to make of what the poet made of this matter'.²⁹ Ricks's aversion to 'exegesis, *critical* elucidation, explication or judgement' (p. xxvi) is perhaps more acceptable as an editorial policy than it would be as the methodology of a doctoral study, but he drew criticism from Louis Menand nevertheless:

The decision to observe a scholarly decorum that prohibits critical judgement or interpretation has led to a wildly indecorous piece of scholarship. The book would not only be a lot shorter, it would be a lot more readable and useful, if Ricks had cheated on his principles and just gone ahead and interpreted.³⁰

I have chosen to interpret but, conscious of the danger of arbitrary subjectivism, I still require a framework that can guide my interpretations.

Hans Robert Jauss's *Rezeptionsästhetik* is content to leave aside the grander theoretical claims of Bloom and Kristeva. In his introduction to Jauss's *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Paul de Man describes the interests of the Konstanz School as 'methodological rather than [. . .] cultural and ideological',³¹ and one of the essays included in the volume is polemically titled 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory'. Jauss aims to clear a path that avoids on the one hand the objectivism of positivist literary history, which 'allowed source study to grow to a hypertrophied degree, and dissolved the specific character of the literary work into a collection of "influences" that could be increased at will' (p. 8), and on the other the 'arbitrary subjectivism' (p. 68) which he sees as the danger of an approach that asserts 'the theory of the 'plural text' with its notion of 'intertextuality' as a limitless and arbitrary production of possibilities of meaning and of no less arbitrary interpretations' (p. 147).³²

In its broadest outlines, Jauss's approach shares with Bloom, and with Eliot before him, a concern with 'the ever necessary retelling of literary history' (p. 20). He

²⁹ *The Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1996), p. xxv.

³⁰ 'How Eliot Became Eliot', *New York Review of Books*, 15 May 1997, p. 27.

³¹ *Toward An Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. vii.

³² Jauss attacks the intertextual approach of Roland Barthes rather than Julia Kristeva. While Kristeva attempts to account objectively for the transposition from one 'système signifiant' to another (*La révolution du langage poétique* [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974], p. 60), Barthes locates the meaning of a text in the interpretation of the reader: 'un texte est fait d'écritures multiples, issues de plusieurs cultures et qui entrent les unes avec les autres en dialogue, en parodie, en contestation; mais il y a un lieu où cette multiplicité se rassemble, et ce lieu, ce n'est pas l'auteur, comme on l'a dit jusqu'à présent, c'est le lecteur [...] L'unité d'un texte n'est pas dans son origine, mais dans sa destination', 'La mort de l'auteur', in *Essais critiques IV: Le bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984), p. 66.

even makes use of the Bloomian ratio of *tessera* in a reading of Goethe's and Valéry's versions of the *Faust* myth (p. 114). However, his use of the ratio is casual, and he does not argue, as Bloom's theory would argue, that Valéry is evading the blocking presence of Goethe. Jauss is not interested in the psycho-drama of literary relations, but in the way that different interpretations of literary works succeed each other over time. I argued earlier that Bloom attempts to narrow the historical, linguistic, and cultural gaps between writers in order to support an understanding of influence that amounts to a relationship of identification between writers. This approach does not serve in the case of Paz's Eliot, who appears in a Mexican context mediated through Spanish translation. Paz is not initially confronted with Eliot's blocking presence but his distance. In order to bridge that distance Paz interprets Eliot through his knowledge as a Mexican writer. He reads Eliot not as an Anglo-American, but as a Spanish American, a Mexican and, given the francophile tendency of Mexican literary culture, as a French writer. Jauss aims to account for just these interpretive operations. He describes the context through which one writer, or a reader, interprets another writer as the 'horizon of expectations'. The more speculative psychological territory of Bloom's theory is deserted in favour of a historical approach:

The analysis of the literary experience of the reader avoids the threatening pitfalls of psychology if it describes the reception and the influence of a work within the objectifiable system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance, from a pre-understanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar works, and from the opposition between poetic and practical language. (p. 22)

Jauss describes a process in which the 'horizon of expectations' guides interpretation of a text which then modifies that horizon:

The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced. (p. 23)

As it alters the old horizon the new text comes to constitute a new horizon which then engages future texts (and future readings of old texts). Jauss thus arrives at a view of change in literary tradition which is driven by the interests of readers and writers but is not subsumed into an overall *telos* or sense of progress.

While he concedes that 'literary tradition [...] is always kept going – though this is often not admitted – from the present interest' (p. 65), he also asserts that an approach which attends consciously to the way that interpretations have been constructed from specific historical circumstances

prevents the text from the past from being naively assimilated to the prejudices and expectations of meaning of the present, and thereby – through explicitly distinguishing the past horizon from the present – allows the poetic text to be seen in its alterity. (p. 146)

Jauss's claim that the horizon of expectations is 'objectifiable', and that his approach 'prevents the text from the past from being naively assimilated to the prejudices and expectations of meaning of the present' might not stand up to persistently sceptical analysis. Prejudice can still infiltrate understanding of past horizons. The nub of his argument lies in 'naively'. A reader may not escape subjectivism in absolute terms, but a less rather than a more naive version of subjectivism is still preferable. Unlike the theories of Bloom and Kristeva, Jauss's methodology is content to operate at the level of such distinctions. In fact, his concern for the historical development of understanding has affinities with the kind of care that Walter Jackson Bate brings to his study of influence. The attention that Jauss's methodology suggests one pay to the details of reception is particularly appropriate for the relationship between Paz and Eliot, which involves translation, and which develops in a context that is alien to the Anglo-American world of Eliot studies to which I myself am accustomed. Jauss does not provide overriding pronouncements on the character of literary relations, but guides me to use the historical details of the relationship between Paz and Eliot that more ambitious theories brush aside. This methodological guidance can help me to deal systematically with Paz's numerous comments on Eliot, and to apply the reception history of Eliot in Spanish to my reading of Paz's poems. I have thus attempted throughout my study to make the important distinction between what Paz knew of Eliot and what he might have known, a distinction of which Jauss himself can be careless, and to be open about the relationship in my work between evidence and inference.³³

My thesis is divided into two sections. The first section establishes the horizon of expectations that obtained in Mexico when Eliot first appeared in Spanish translation. The first chapter of this section, 'Mexican Eliot', takes the earliest translations of *The*

³³ In a lengthy discussion of Goethe's and Valéry's versions of *Faust*, Jauss reveals disconcertingly that 'one has reason to doubt whether he [Valéry] even ever really knew Goethe's *Faust II*' (p. 115).

Waste Land and *The Hollow Men* and attempts to situate them in relation to the English poems they translate. I ask how they challenge the assumptions of Eliot Studies, and suggest the Anglo-American readings of Eliot that are most helpful for an understanding of his Mexican reception. The next two chapters, 'Precursors' and 'Contemporaries', insert Eliot into the "literary series" (Jauss, 32) that comprises poets who were read in Mexico before Eliot and then in conjunction with him. Part Two follows the history of Paz's relationship with Eliot as far as 'Himno entre ruinas' (1948). Eliot changes throughout this history as Paz reads him in different translations and then in English; Paz's horizon of expectations also changes as he reads and meets other writers, and his own prose thinking and poetic practice change. The literary relation between Paz and Eliot emerges from these three narratives. I conclude the study at a relatively early point in Paz's career. My choice is dictated in part by my adoption of a reception methodology: there is not the space within the strict confines of a doctoral thesis both to establish the context in which Paz first read Eliot, and to account for the later stages of the relationship. Yet the nature of the subject also guides my choice. The most productive years of an influence tend to be the early ones in which the pattern of the relationship is established. I take Richard Sieburth's *Instigations: Ezra Pound and Remy de Gourmont* as a model, which concentrates almost exclusively on the early part of Pound's career. Nevertheless, I accept that the history that I wanted to recount, and which a reader may wish to pursue, does continue beyond 'Himno entre ruinas'. I have therefore included my research on the later stages of Paz's career in three appendices which act as a supplement to the reception history covered by the doctoral thesis.

The relationship between Paz and Eliot is not my own discovery. I was first alerted to it in Charles Tomlinson's brief introduction to his Penguin selection of Paz's poems. Paz reads *The Waste Land* as an analagous poem to Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* 'with its spatial and musical structure', according to Tomlinson, although he warns against too close an identification of Eliot's 'moments in and out of time' with Paz's own meditations.³⁴ Other isolated observations followed: Henry Gifford in an introduction to *The Penguin Book of Latin American Verse* found echoes of *Burnt Norton* in 'Cuento de dos jardines',³⁵ and when Michael Schmidt presented Paz's last public reading in London he compared the criticism of the two poets before describing

³⁴ *Selected Poems*, trans. by Charles Tomlinson and others (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 13.

³⁵ *The Penguin Book of Latin American Verse*, ed. by Enrique Caracciolo-Trejo (London: Penguin, 1971), p. xlv.

Paz's progress from *Piedra de sol* (1957) to *Pasado en claro* (1975) in terms of the trajectory of Eliot's own career.³⁶ But Schmidt was drawing an analogy rather than describing an actual relationship in which Paz had read Eliot. This can be a productive method, and a politic one, since it avoids the problems of influence study that have taxed this introduction. Essays such as Michael Edwards's "'Renga', Translation, and Eliot's Ghost"³⁷ and Pablo Zambrano's 'Paz, Borges, Eliot: Tres recreaciones del eterno retorno' choose this route. Zambrano observes 'coincidencias' which are suggestive but also frustrating when they decline to acknowledge that Paz did read Eliot and that similarities between them are often more than chance.³⁸ Similarly, Judith Myers Hoover in 'The Urban Nightmare: Alienation Imagery in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot and Octavio Paz', cannot decide, in spite of a number of close readings of poems by the two writers, whether Eliot is a 'precursor', or whether different works simply 'converge' or 'share' characteristics.³⁹ I have sympathy with this caution and in the ensuing study I will be careful not to force a causal connection between Paz and Eliot when I feel that the relationship is one of analogy or coincidence. Nevertheless, there is a reception history available. Hoover neither makes use of this, and so mixes Eliot poems that Paz knew at particular stages of his career with ones that he probably didn't; nor does she use the original versions of Paz's poems, but quotes from the 1976 edition of *Libertad bajo palabra*, a product of numerous revisions. Any clear sense of the way that the relationship unfolded over a specific historical period has been greatly attenuated. In a brief article, 'Tradición y traducción: Acerca de las relaciones de Octavio Paz con la poesía anglosajona', Jason Wilson, whose *Octavio Paz* lists in passing a number of Eliotic echoes in Paz's work, suggests something closer to my approach.⁴⁰ He refers to the Enrique Munguía version of *The Waste Land* that was Paz's first encounter with Eliot, and also raises questions about the role of translation in literary relations. He provides a starting point for my own study, which is no doubt also guided by his supervision. I aim by adopting the Jaussian methodology of Reception Studies to develop his prompting. The most recent discussion of Paz and Eliot occurs in Manuel

³⁶ Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, 10 June 1996.

³⁷ *P.N. Review*, 7, 2 (1980), 24-28.

³⁸ *Las formas del mito en las literaturas hispánicas del siglo XX* (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 1994), p. 199. By contrast, Christopher Ricks is careful, in his edition of Eliot's earliest poems, to make the distinction: 'No parallel passage has here been proposed which the editor judges a coincidence (though coincidences can be very interesting)', *IMH*, xxiv.

³⁹ *Journal of Spanish Studies*, 6, 1 (1978), pp. 13, 14 & 21.

⁴⁰ *Ínsula*, 46, 532-533 (abril-mayo 1991), 34-35.

Ulacia's *El árbol milenario* (1999). He makes some extensive observations on Paz's use of Eliot in the 1940s and, while I tend not to agree with those observations in detail, I find them a useful point of departure for those parts of my own study that deal with this period.

I am preceded by two theses. The first was a *Tesis de maestría* by Irma González Pelayo, titled *Octavio Paz y T. S. Eliot: Un diálogo en la tradición de la ruptura* (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1991). She pays little attention to the reception history of the relationship. In fact, she reports Paz as claiming that Juan Ramón Jiménez was one of the first translators of *The Waste Land* (p. 141). Neither the claim nor the assertion that Paz made it are true.⁴¹ Without a clearly defined sense of how and when Paz knew Eliot's work, González tends, like other writers before her, to veer unpredictably between influence and a vaguer sense of 'convergencia' (p. 131) or 'los paralelismos y divergencias de sus sistemas poéticos' (p. 140). She describes the relationship between the two as a 'diálogo intertextual' (p. 7), which implies a Bakhtinian or Kristevan approach; but she does not develop this aspect of her study and tends towards simultaneously generalized and categorical readings of the two authors in the manner of 'tanto T. S. Eliot como Octavio Paz han encontrado la manera de documentar y expresar la nueva sensibilidad del hombre moderno' (p. 10). When their achievements are presented so unambiguously it is difficult to find much dialogue, and Paz's own writings appear curiously monologic – they are never challenged, advanced, hindered, or expanded by his reading of Eliot. González makes good local observations on some of Paz's Eliotic poems, such as *Entre la piedra y la flor* (1941), but the sense that she gives of the relationship is disappointingly inert.

Pedro Serrano's MPhil thesis, *The Rhetorical Construction of the Modern Poet in T. S. Eliot and Octavio Paz in Poetry and Criticism* (King's College London, 1995), has a chapter devoted to the early reception of T. S. Eliot in Mexico with some astute observations on Ramón López Velarde. However, this approach does not extend to the rest of the thesis, which is divided into two separate studies of Eliot and Paz. Serrano clearly wanted to escape what he describes as the 'traditional definitions' of influence studies (p. 8). His aim is laudable – the tendency of 'influence' to insist upon what is often a crude understanding of causality with its attendant assumption of 'debt' can be pernicious. Yet having denied himself any sense whatsoever of causal connection

⁴¹ González Pelayo refers to *Pasión crítica* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1990), p. 22, where Paz in fact describes 'algunas traducciones' by Juan Ramón Jiménez 'de poemas cortos de Eliot, como "Marine"'.

between the two authors – causal connection which his isolated chapter on Eliot's reception explores convincingly – Serrano is forced to fall back on the vague discussion that I have already cited of 'coincidences' (p. 7), or 'parallel cases' (p. 10). He denies himself a *tertium comparationis* – whether the causal relation of influence or a developed sense of what Paz and Eliot share as 'modern poets' – and so his observations on the similarities between them appear arbitrary. His idea of 'the rhetorical construction of the modern poet' in fact changes when applied to each poet. With Eliot it carries a positive value – rhetorical construction is proof of his modernity; with Paz, however, it gathers pejorative overtones and rhetorical construction comes to imply a dishonest fabrication.

I have used this previous work on Paz and Eliot for promptings and stray observations. My own interests, however, take me to the specific details of the reception history involved in the relationship. I have found Anthony Stanton's work on Octavio Paz a useful model in this respect. Stanton has carried out detailed research into the relations between the work of Paz and poets such as Francisco de Quevedo and Luis Cernuda. Although he has not written extensively on the subject of my own study, he discussed Eliot repeatedly with Paz, and I am grateful for what he has shared of those conversations with me. His sense of the historical development of Paz's career helps to open the aspect of dialogue in Paz's work. Critics such as Guillermo Sucre and Juan Malpartida tend to recycle Paz's prose statements as if they were incontestable truth. By showing that Paz's thinking changed over time and in response to different reading, Stanton reveals a more various Paz. He has acted as both a model and a source of information and interpretation for my own application of reception methodology.

I must accept that my adoption of a Reception Studies approach to the relationship between Paz and Eliot involves loss as well as gain. Lost are the psychological and purely textual explorations that Bloom and Kristeva promise. Yet, as I have argued, I believe that neither Bloom nor Kristeva develops the promise of their thinking into a theory that will serve the circumstances of my own subject adequately. Jauss suggests a method for using those circumstances and, while I accept that my conclusions will be vulnerable to supplement, revision, and contradiction by more sophisticated psychological and linguistic approaches than my own, the ensuing study can still, by virtue of having elected a specific territory, provide the basis for future debate on the relationship between Octavio Paz and T. S. Eliot.

PART ONE
Mexican Horizons

Chapter One

Eliot in Spanish

Hans Robert Jauss's horizon of expectations provides a model for situating the first Spanish translations of T. S. Eliot within the broader literary context of early 1930s Mexico. The metaphor of the horizon should not be applied too literally, however. There is not one single horizon that obtains so much as a number of writers and loosely defined movements which, sometimes in agreement and sometimes in disagreement, with T. S. Eliot and with each other, provide the context for Paz's own interpretations.¹ Before establishing these multiple horizons, however, I will use this chapter to look at the texts themselves that first brought T. S. Eliot to Paz – Enrique Manguía's translation of *The Waste Land* (1930) and León Felipe's of *The Hollow Men* (1931). 'Eliot in Spanish' proposes a further modification of the Jaussian model, which would suggest that the Mexican horizon, or horizons, of expectations be established before speculating on the possible meanings that Paz might find in the texts. In terms of broad principle I accept this approach. However, it is difficult in practical terms to establish what is relevant to Eliot of the Mexican context without some prior sense of what the Eliot is in these Spanish translations. I need to ask what are often material questions about the nature of these translations: are they in prose or verse; in the case of *The Waste Land* are the original notes, in themselves a sub-horizon, translated; do introductions, another significant context that can shape interpretation, accompany the translations? The model of context then text is replaced with a backwards and forwards movement between text and context. This is not such a tidy approach but it gives a better chance of ensuring that observations are germane. As an English reader, I also need to begin with a sense of these translations as distinct from the poems that they mediate. I come to this project with my own sense of Eliot's poems in English, and with a knowledge of Anglo-American critical interpretations of those poems, both of which could interfere with my project. Jauss talks of the reader's, or historian's, need to distinguish their own present horizon from a given horizon in the past to allow 'the poetic text to be seen in its alterity' (p. 146). I cannot simply forget my own knowledge of Eliot and Eliot criticism,

¹ Jauss himself refers to multiple 'horizons' (p. 175).

nor do I believe that it would benefit my study greatly if I could. It is not as if Anglo-American and Mexican literary culture were so distant as to be mutually incomprehensible. I do need, however, to recognize that among the multiple horizons that constitute Anglo-American criticism of T. S. Eliot there are some which are more relevant than others to the Mexican context. In addition to establishing some of the material character of the first Spanish translations of T. S. Eliot, I will also use this chapter to suggest some of the Anglo-American approaches to Eliot's work that are most pertinent for the Mexican horizons that obtain in Paz's own readings.

Paz did not leave a completely unambiguous record of his Eliot reading. The two *Vuelta* articles of 1988 that I cited in my introduction, 'T. S. Eliot' and 'Rescate de Enrique Manguía', confirm that he started with 'El páramo'. There is also evidence, which I will discuss later, that he read León Felipe's translation of *The Hollow Men*, which appeared in *Contemporáneos* six months after 'El páramo'. Beyond these details the picture becomes sketchy:

Leí el poema ['El páramo'] una y otra vez; me procuré otra traducción publicada en Madrid; leí los otros poemas de Eliot vertidos al español (fue muy traducido en esos años, sobre todo en México); finalmente, cuando progresé en el aprendizaje del inglés, me atreví a leerlo en su idioma original. ('TSE', 40)

That 'otra traducción' must have been *Tierra baldía* (1930), the version by Ángel Flores which was actually published in Barcelona shortly before 'El páramo' appeared. With the exception of 'Los hombres huecos', the further Mexican translations to which he refers do not start to appear until 1938.² The 'finalmente' that prefixes the next stage implies that he didn't read Eliot in English until some time after those translations. It seems prudent to assume, then, that Paz was reading Eliot in English during his stay in the United States from the end of 1943 to 1945, but that translations were a significant aspect of the relation before this time. I do not think that the available evidence can be pushed any further.³ The one anomaly that I have found to this chronology occurs in an interview of 1988 for the English television programme *Bookmark*. Paz is describing his poem *Entre la piedra y la flor*, which he began composing in the Yucatán in 1937:

² They were by Rodolfo Usigli, 'El canto de amor de J. Alfred Prufrock', *Revista Poesía*, suplemento, 2 (abril 1938), 1-10, and by Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano, 'Miércoles de ceniza', *Sur*, 48 (septiembre 1938), 20-9.

³ The picture can be filled out when Paz's library becomes available to researchers. This may take some time since negotiations between the organizers of the Fundación Octavio Paz and the author's wife, Marie José Paz, have reached an impasse.

I was very young and a little before I have read Eliot – *The Waste Land*. And I was fascinated immediately. For me it was one of the great discoveries. I was twenty-two when I read *The Waste Land*.⁴

Paz was twenty-two in 1936. Did he then fabricate that momentous encounter of 1930 with T. S. Eliot in the pages of *Contemporáneos*? He would not be the first writer to doctor his autobiography. However, in other accounts he consistently describes reading Eliot in *Contemporáneos*,⁵ a version of events that is borne out by the evidence of his early poems. One would also expect an aspiring young writer attending the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria in Mexico City in 1930 to be reading *Contemporáneos*, since a number of its contributors taught there. I would speculate, then, that a slip of the memory apart, this reading of *The Waste Land* in 1936 either represents his discovery of the Ángel Flores translation or a return to the poem after his initial reading, or even his first encounter with the original in English (although the evidence of ‘T. S. Eliot’ would suggest a later date for this last possibility).

Paz declared of Manguía’s version that ‘me desconcertó’ (‘REM’, 42). Ángel Flores was also disturbed, and wrote Eliot to ask if Manguía had sought authorization, as Flores had done, adding:

The thing is so pitifully done that I am inclined to believe that you have not been informed about it at all. At all events, this so-called prose translation will harm you and the circulation of the Spanish edition which, incidentally, has been warmly received in Spain.⁶

Eliot replied that indeed he had given permission for Manguía to translate the poem, who ‘had some claim upon me, being introduced by a mutual friend’, but that he had not been presented with the version for approval before publication.⁷ Flores had himself been fastidious about such consultation. In his original letter requesting permission to publish *Tierra baldía* (MS VE, 30 January 1928) he asked Eliot to clarify the meaning

⁴ ‘Octavio Paz’, unpublished transcript of *Bookmark* interview broadcast on BBC2 (29 February 1988), p. 5.

⁵ See, for example, *PC*, 129-30, and ‘La evolución poética de Octavio Paz’, interview with William Ferguson, *Diorama de la Cultura* (supl. de *Excelsior*), 2 julio 1972, p. 8.

⁶ 20 November 1930, Private Collection, Mrs. Valerie Eliot, London.

⁷ 9 December 1930, MS VE. Eliot assured Flores that ‘I shall write to protest’, yet there is no evidence that he did, and he allowed Charles K. Colhoun in the ‘Foreign Periodicals’ section of the *Criterion* to mention the publication in *Contemporáneos* of ‘a translation from the works of Mr. T. S. Eliot (‘El páramo’, by Enrique Manguía, Jr.), prefaced by a general survey of Mr. Eliot’s work’, *Criterion* 10, 41, (July 1931), p. 783.

of certain lines, and when Eliot then checked the translation it was with enough care to ask if the rendition of 'burning' in 'The Fire Sermon' as 'consumiéndome' would work simply as 'consumiendo' (MS VE, 22 February 1928). Flores obliged with 'abrasando'.⁸

'El páramo' suffers from having by-passed this process: 'musing upon the king my brother's wreck', for example, becomes 'rememoré al rey que fue destruido por mi hermano'; and 'Mrs Equitone' becomes 'la señora del tono igual' (Manguía, 23 & 17), the prepositional construction classing her syntactically alongside 'la dama de las peñas' - another card in the Tarot pack rather than a person. Confronted with lapses that have more to do with grammatical competence than any question of interpretation, Flores's censure is understandable. Paz's 'desconcierto' is also understandable, and he would later describe the Flores version as 'hasta la fecha, la mejor versión' while admitting of the Manguía that 'no acertó ni con el tono del poema ni con el título (*El páramo* no es exactamente *The Waste Land*)' ('REM', 42).⁹ However, it was the Manguía, not the Flores translation, that offered Paz his first encounter with Eliot: 'lo leí y releí muchas veces hasta que, poco a poco, comencé a comprender' ('REM', 42). Without the original or a better translation as condemnatory points of comparison, those repeated readings were productive if, in retrospect, partial. When he received the T. S. Eliot Prize in 1988 and looked back at what Eliot had meant to him, it was Manguía that Paz recalled: 'nunca lo conocí y hoy repito su nombre con gratitud y con pena' ('TSE', 40).¹⁰

The shock that Paz experienced when he first read 'El páramo' cannot be blamed solely on Enrique Manguía's incompetence. Readers in England had also been rattled by Eliot's poem. Charles Powell, in *The Manchester Guardian*, lamented that

meaning, plan, and intention alike are massed behind a smokescreen of anthropological and literary erudition, and only the pundit, the pedant, or the clairvoyant will be in the least aware of them.¹¹

Powell was reviewing the first English book edition of *The Waste Land* (1923) which came accompanied by Eliot's notes. The notes oscillate curiously between an anonymous record of sources and the authoritative critical voice that Eliot was

⁸ *Tierra baldía* (Barcelona: Editorial Cervantes, 1930), p. 30.

⁹ In an interview with Roberto González Echevarría and Emir Rodríguez Monegal of 1972 Paz stated that the Flores translation 'es muy superior a la de Manguía [*sic*]' (PC, 22).

¹⁰ The 'pena' that Paz expresses refers obliquely to Manguía's suicide in Geneva only a few months after the publication of 'El páramo'. Paz describes this series of events in PC, 22-3.

¹¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 31 October 1923; repr. in *T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, vol. 1, ed. by Michael Grant (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 194.

cultivating in his literary journalism. They refrain from elaborating on the meaning of the references at the same time as they assert the author's control over proceedings. His note on the tarot cards, for example, informs the reader that 'he is not familiar with the exact constitution' of the pack, and that he departs from it for his own 'convenience' and 'purpose' (*CPP*, 76); yet that purpose is not articulated. He cannily withholds information that he implies is held firmly in his own grasp just out of reach. Critics were faced with a choice. They could either, as Cleanth Brooks eventually did, follow where the notes led, and prove that the allusions amounted to a structure within which the fragmentary appearance of the poem made sense as a 'unified whole';¹² or they could refuse to play along, as Powell refuses, and dismiss the whole affair as a 'smokescreen'. In 'The Frontiers of Criticism' (1956) Eliot confessed that he regretted 'having sent so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase' (*OPP*, 108). Yet even the readers who declined the chase deferred to the authority of the notes. Powell does not suggest that the poem could be read apart from such baggage. He cannot see beyond the 'smokescreen', and his eagerness to denigrate 'the pundit, the pedant and the clairvoyant' who might find something in it suggests insecurity. What if our failure to detect 'meaning, plan, and intention' is due not to our lack of pedantry but to our ignorance? Harold Monro clearly felt got at by the poem and parodied Eliot's allusion to Marvell, 'But at my back I always hear / Eliot's intellectual sneer.'¹³ In a sense, the notes provided a much needed horizon of expectations for a poem that defied conventional sense. Yet the horizon was dictated by the author. Readers felt intimidated by the author's expectations rather than measuring the poem against their own.

As a young Mexican, Paz is less vulnerable to the insecurity that informs Powell's and Monro's responses. He was unlikely to have felt culpably ignorant when faced with the erudition of a North American poet resident in London; Eliot's culture was different from his own. Paz needn't have felt that he *ought* to know the sources of these allusions. He also encountered a different text from the English reviewers. Manguía selects from Eliot's notes, and places them at the bottom of the page rather than at the end of the poem. He consistently excises the kind of authorial presence that I have quoted in the example of the tarot pack above. The notes are less numerous, less conspicuous, and they no longer suggest an author-approved reading of the poem. In

¹² *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), p. 136.

¹³ 'Notes for a Study of "The Waste Land": An Imaginary Dialogue with T. S. Eliot', *Chapbook*, 34 (February 1923); repr. in Grant, ed., 165.

fact, the guiding role that the notes play in the English book version is taken over by Manguía's own 'inteligente prólogo', as Paz would later describe it ('TSE', 40). The notes that Manguía does provide read as an extension to this introduction – they provide the help of another reader, rather than a reminder from the author of whose poem this is. Manguía's presentation of *The Waste Land* thus provides a more amenable mediation of the poem's strangeness than the original book editions in English.

The very fact that 'El páramo' appeared in a periodical, as *The Waste Land* had done originally in *The Dial* and *The Criterion* (1922), also influences the relationship between text and reader. Guillermo Sheridan, in his history of the group that contributed to *Contemporáneos*, describes this circumstance:

Generadoras de la historia literaria, las revistas, vehículos de la inquietud más intrigante, permiten el ejercicio de la aventura con mayor solvencia que el libro.¹⁴

Works in a periodical are not experienced with the same finality as in a book. The reader is permitted to view them as provisional rather than monumental, allowed to connect them to his or her own reading and to other works in the same periodical, without having to refer them back to an institutional literary history.

Quite apart from the material circumstances that characterize the publication of 'El páramo', Paz was probably better disposed temperamentally towards obscure poems than were many of its first English readers. He later confessed that 'siempre me ha gustado la poesía difícil, la poesía con secreto'.¹⁵ As a practising poet rather than a critic he would also tend to be more comfortable with a work that resisted interpretation if it provided serviceable images or a form that aroused his curiosity. Eliot himself made the point in a discussion of Shakespeare criticism that 'interpretation is necessary perhaps only in so far as one is passive, not creative, oneself'.¹⁶ Natural disposition, combined with circumstances which in some ways distanced Paz from Eliot's text, provided space for him to exercise this more creative, less interpretive response.

Manguía's choice of prose to translate *The Waste Land* itself makes the allusions less conspicuous. The reference to Webster's *White Devil* of "O keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men, / Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!" is separated from the passage of 'The Burial of the Dead' in which it occurs by several formal

¹⁴ *Los Contemporáneos ayer* (México: FCE, 1985), p. 365.

¹⁵ *Xavier Villaurrutia en persona y en obra* (México: FCE, 1978), p. 34.

¹⁶ 'Introduction' to *G. Wilson Knight: The Wheel of Fire, Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930; repr. London: Methuen, 1967), p. xviii.

characteristics: the use of verse isolates individual lines; the rhyming couplet, 'men' / 'again', effectively brackets the quotation; and the register of 'far hence' intrudes as a language from another period.¹⁷ Manguía neither annotates the reference nor does he attempt to signal the switch of register, and the other means are unavailable to him in prose:

Ahuyenta de allí al Perro que es amigo del hombre porque, si no, con sus uñas lo desenterrará de nuevo. (Manguía, 18)

The result is curiously matter-of-fact, particularly in the fastidiousness of its logic - 'si no' is wholly unruffled by the oddity of the clause that it introduces. This deadpan presentation of bizarre and fairly macabre material is oneiric, an effect which is accentuated when the lines are no longer identified as an allusion. They gather the indeterminacy and numinosity of dream. In a sense Manguía rescues an aspect of *The Waste Land* that its allusive framework attenuated: 'the atmosphere of unknown terror and mystery in which our life is passed'.¹⁸ Paz's poem 'Sueño de Eva' of 1945 engages the sense of the unknown that bears so threateningly on parts of Eliot's early work. It has commonly been read as a surrealist experiment in oneirism yet it echoes this passage from 'The Burial of the Dead' along with other poems by Eliot. What from one point of view is Manguía's faulty translation and negligent editing seems to have suggested a point of confluence for Paz between two influences that are in many other ways antagonistic.

Eliot's use of allusion is obscured in 'El páramo' but it is not totally suppressed. Manguía draws attention to it in his introduction:

La cita en Eliot no es, como sí suele serlo en otros, decoración o aderezo sino más bien, por la tradición que lleva implícita, algo subordinado a él que al mismo tiempo es parte integrante de sí mismo: una función y un modo, *su* modo de ser. (Manguía, 14)

Manguía's reading of the allusions is particular. He does not attempt to find in them a hidden structure for the poem. They do not refer to a 'predetermined scheme', as Cleanth Brooks would attempt to demonstrate, in which 'chaotic experience' could be 'ordered into a new whole' (Brooks, 167). They are a part of the speaker's 'mode of being'; that is, they are symptomatic of a particular consciousness, not redemptive of it.

¹⁷ *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 63.

¹⁸ Eliot, 'London Letter', *Dial*, 73, 3 (September 1922), p. 330.

The individual allusions themselves are not as important as the habit of mind that they typify. That mind belonged to ‘el hombre cultivado de nuestra época’:

Nos sorprende Eliot con un tema nuevo, de nuevo característico, muy suyo - ¿o muy nuestro? -: el del agotamiento afectivo, el de la desolación allá en los círculos más espesos y oscuros de la conciencia del hombre cultivado de nuestra época. (Manguía, 11)

Manguía advertises ‘un tema nuevo’, a phrase that would alert a reader new to Eliot’s work and looking for orientation. Eliot’s poem portrays the emotional failure of the cultured mind, and Mallarmé’s weary “‘hélas, la chair est triste et j’ai lu tous les livres”” [sic] from ‘Brise marine’ is cited as an analogy (p. 9). Manguía’s expression ‘la conciencia del hombre cultivado de nuestra época’ neatly compacts two persistent elements of Paz’s reading of *The Waste Land* – the psychological and the historical. Paz claimed:

La fusión del yo subjetivo y el nosotros histórico, mejor dicho, la intersección entre el destino social y el individual, fue y es la gran novedad de *The Waste Land*. (‘TSE’, 41)

Paz did not completely ignore Eliot’s habit of allusion. His own poems of the 1940s and 50s display an interest in myth, influenced by surrealist primitivism, and his own *Obra poética* (1990) carries notes to explain particular references. In an article of 1943 he compared Agustín Yáñez’s work unfavourably to Eliot’s, in which the allusions ‘forman parte de la materia verbal, dejan de ser meras referencias y se conviertan en vida’.¹⁹ By this stage Paz would certainly have known the translation of *The Waste Land* by Ángel Flores, whose introduction talked of the poem’s ‘plan claro’ and ‘base científica’ (Flores, 7 & 8). Yet Flores also read the allusions as symptomatic of a certain kind of failure:

A menudo gestos y gestas se acumulan en una imagen, en una frase, y entonces el poeta se asfixia. El lenguaje se le vuelve inservible. Las normas de la expresión se rompen. Y entonces no queda más remedio que tomar una frase ya hecha, una frase que por haberla usado un Dante o un Shakespeare, está ya preñada de significación. (Flores, 9)

¹⁹ *Primeras letras (1931-1943)* (México: Editorial Vuelta, 1988), p. 244.

Manguía's own suggestion, that the allusions portray the failure of a particular, historically located sensibility, stays with Paz. It may even be through that psychological portraiture that the allusions 'se conviertan en vida' for him. One outcome of this reading is that the allusions become subject to qualification by other registers, a relativizing of the poem's content that becomes known later in Spanish America as *antipoesía*. This consequence of Manguía's reading is particularly evident in Paz's work of the early 1940s in which Eliot provides a model for poems that describe their own failure.

Manguía's reading of *The Waste Land* as a portrait of a certain type of sensibility is distinct from the approaches embodied by Brooks, Powell and Monro. He is closer to Conrad Aiken's response. In a review of 1923 Aiken complained about 'the use of allusions which may have both intellectual and emotional value for Mr. Eliot, but (even with the notes) none for us'.²⁰ He rejected this aspect of the poem but could still "accept" the work as we would accept a powerful, melancholy tone-poem' (p. 161). Ronald Bush has since elaborated on Aiken's suggestion that the notes can be dispensed with. He declares:

The title of *The Waste Land* and what now seems to be its controlling myth (the Grail legend) had been late additions to the poem: Eliot used them to frame and unify his fragments, and in the process introduced a "spurious plot" that long obscured *The Waste Land's* lyrical center.²¹

I think that Bush, and Aiken before him, exaggerate the case for *The Waste Land* as a pure lyric. The notes exist, and even if one questions the success of the plot that they imply, the intention that they evince is still a part of the poem. Although Eliot referred to the 'wild goose chase' (*OPP*, 110) that many critics had embarked on, he also remarked in 1950, referring to the Dantescan allusion in the London Bridge passage of 'The Burial of the Dead':

I gave the reference in my notes, in order to make the reader who recognized the allusion, know that I meant him to recognize it, and know that he would have missed the point if he did not recognize it. (*TCC*, 128)

Nevertheless, the approach of Aiken and Bush has been a salutary corrective in Eliot studies, and it helps to identify a marked tendency of Manguía's own reading, which in

²⁰ 'An Anatomy of Melancholy', *New Republic*, 7 February 1923; repr. in Grant, ed., 158.

²¹ *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 96.

turn influences Paz. Where Manguía takes an important turn from these American critics, however, is in describing the spuriousness of the plot described by the allusions as part of the point, as symptomatic of the consciousness that is being portrayed.

Manguía goes into some detail on the composition of the sensibility that operates at the 'lyrical centre' of the poem. Eliot

se demuestra la imposibilidad de dar cabida *dentro de un solo marco*, en forma orgánica, a la imaginación, a la intuición, a la emoción y a la razón. Y aún con más claridad: sin que exista la posibilidad de reunir armoniosamente en un todo sistematizado a estos elementos psicológicos que son la base imprescindible de la personalidad, el hombre cultivado se percata, sin poder evitarlo, de una discontinuidad subjetiva y periódica. (Manguía, 11)

Manguía demonstrates familiarity with Eliot's own prose discussions of affect. Earlier, he describes the role of 'la conjunta sabiduría de los nervios y del tacto para transformar, en el momento de la recreación poética, la palabra escondida y dispersa en una unidad sensual' (p. 8). The rhetoric of 'nerves' and the physical sense of 'touch' echo the injunction of 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921) that 'one must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive tracts' (*SE*, 290),²² and the reference in 'Phillip Massinger' (1920) to 'a period when the intellect was immediately at the tips of the senses' (*SW*, 109). These statements were consolidated by Eliot in 'The Metaphysical Poets' as his theory of the 'dissociation of sensibility', a moment in the seventeenth century after which 'the language became more refined' but 'the feeling became more crude' (*SE*, 288). Although Manguía does not mention the theory by name, his identification of 'agotamiento afectivo' does imply that he understands the speaker of *The Waste Land* as, at least in part, a representative of a specific moment in history.

The attention that Manguía pays to *The Waste Land* as evidence of a historically located affective disposition gives Paz a particular introduction to Eliot's work. The poem that Manguía reads, in which allusions express the author's 'modo de ser', has strong affinities with the dramatization of a perceiving consciousness that can be found in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (composed 1910-11). Paz would not have known Eliot's earlier poem, which does not appear in Spanish translation until 1938, although Manguía quotes the opening passage of 'Prufrock', accompanied with a vague

²² *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932; 3rd edn, 1951), p. 290.

comment about metaphors fired at high temperatures (p. 10).²³ Nevertheless, Munguía's introduction does provide a link between *The Waste Land* and the psychologizing mode of Eliot's earliest poems.

Yet *The Waste Land* was not 'Prufrock' but a much stranger poem. For the young Paz the most immediately striking aspect of that strangeness was its form:

La forma del poema era inusitada: las rupturas, los saltos bruscos, y los enlaces inesperados, el carácter fragmentario de cada parte y la manera aparentemente desordenada en que se enlazan (aunque dueña de una secreta coherencia), la amalgama de distintas figuras y personajes, la yuxtaposición de tiempos y espacios – el siglo XX y la Edad Media, Alejandría y Londres, los ritos de fertilidad y las guerras púnicas –, la mezcla de frases coloquiales y citas de textos poéticos y religiosos en griego y en sánscrito. El poema no se parecía a los que yo había leído antes. ('TSE', 40)

Paz accumulates a vocabulary of fragmentation which recreates a pressing sense of the confusion that the poem's form generated. The parenthetical 'aunque dueña de una secreta coherencia' floats in the middle of this confusion rather than ordering it with any conviction. It is yet another part rather than a cohesive principle.

Michael Rosen, in a discussion of Schumann's *Dichterliebe*, provides an extensive and suggestive discussion of the fragment as an artistic form. For Rosen the fragment does not represent a breakdown of meaning, but a challenge to it:

This aesthetic [of the fragment] does not completely destroy the relation of part to whole, of art to reality, but disturbs it and puts it into question.²⁴

He describes it as a typically romantic form, although as M. H. Abrams has demonstrated, the romantic preoccupation with the fragment has antecedents in neo-Platonism and the myth of the Fall.²⁵ In its neo-Platonic form, however, the fragment functions as a metaphor which is contrasted with images of unity or wholeness. It is during the romantic period that its potential is realized as form as well as metaphor. Rosen engages in both readings and supplements his formal analysis of 'the relation of

²³ 'Prufrock' was included in Conrad Aiken's anthology, *Modern American Poets* (London: Martin Secker, 1922), which, according to Manuel Ulacia, provided 'una de las lecturas que le dejan [a Paz] una enorme huella', *El árbol milenario* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg/Círculo de Lectores, 1999), p. 98. Ulacia does not say when Paz acquired the collection, however, and Paz's own references to 'Prufrock' refer to the Usigli translation.

²⁴ *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 77.

²⁵ See *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), pp. 141-95.

part to whole' with a metaphorical description of the fragment in *Dichterliebe* as 'an emblem of unsatisfied desire' (p. 41). As one reads *The Waste Land*, however, unsatisfied desire is not emblemized so much as experienced. The poem's form constantly disrupts anticipated continuities and diverts the reader's attention in unexpected directions. Conrad Aiken provided an exception among early readers when he identified the formal confusion of *The Waste Land* as part of its point rather than untidiness that the plan of its notes controlled:

The poem succeeds – as it brilliantly does – by virtue of its incoherence, not of its plan; by virtue of its ambiguities, not of its explanations. (Grant, ed., 161)

French symbolism, and in particular the works of Stéphane Mallarmé, himself preoccupied with analogies between music and literature, are commonly regarded as a decisive moment in this formal experiment with fragmentation. Attention has been more commonly directed, however, to the links between Eliot and the minor French symbolist Jules Laforgue. Edmund Wilson denied Eliot a meaningful relationship with Mallarmé, insisting that he remain in the company of Laforgue:

It is from the conversational-ironic, rather than from the serious-aesthetic, tradition of Symbolism that T. S. Eliot derives.²⁶

Yet Eliot did discuss Mallarmé both before and after the publication of *The Waste Land*; and while Manguía's introduction concedes the primacy of Laforgue's influence on Eliot, it does not exclude the 'serious-aesthetic tradition' when it notes the importance of 'los simbolistas franceses: Corbière [*sic*], Mallarmé, y, especialmente, Laforgue' (p. 9). Ángel Flores too, in his much more cursory introduction to *Tierra baldía*, suggests Apollinaire, a prominent modern inheritor of Mallarmé's formal experiment, as an example of the lineage to which Eliot belongs, a suggestion which Paz will follow (Flores, 8).

In a pair of essays, 'The Relation Between Syntax and Music in some Modern Poems in English' and 'Pound and Eliot: A Distinction', Donald Davie offers a detailed reading of Eliot's poems as an expression of the 'serious-aesthetic' symbolism of Mallarmé and Paul Valéry.²⁷ Davie's interest lies in the analogy that the symbolists

²⁶ *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (New York: Scribner, 1942), p. 96.

²⁷ Both are collected in *The Poet in the Imaginary Museum: Essays of Two Decades* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1977).

drew between music and poetry, in their awareness that 'poetry, like music, erects its structures in the lapse of time' (p. 95). Davie's own definition compacts two tendencies of symbolist description of the poem. 'Erects' is an architectural analogy which presents the poem as a static physical structure. The awareness that as one reads the poem, however, one's engagement with it takes place 'in the lapse of time' vitiates the sense of comprehensively perceptible structure that the architectural analogy implies. The lapse of time forces the reader into a constant dual action of anticipation and retrospection, and it opens discontinuities between these two actions. Once the poem exploits these discontinuities, the architectural analogy of structure becomes replaced with the analogy of fragment, or ruin.

One of Davie's key examples is the grammatically ambiguous 'troubled, confused...' in 'A Game of Chess':

...her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid - troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours. (CPP, 64)

Davie points out that as 'troubled, confused' end the line they are most naturally read as adjectival past participles; it is only as the reader commences the ensuing line, 'And drowned...', that they become, retrospectively, past indicative. There is no resolution to this ambiguity; they function differently as the reader crosses the line: the white space of the page generates a change of function (p. 101). The observation is borrowed from William Empson, who describes the ambiguity as a form of mimesis, the

blurring of grammar into luxury [...] where, after *powdered* and the two similar words have acted as adjectives, it gives a sense of swooning or squinting, or the *stirring* of things seen through convection currents, to think of *troubled* and *confused* as verbs.²⁸

The confusion that 'troubled, confused' cause either reflects the scene being described – 'stirring of things' – or the observer – their physical disposition of 'squinting' with their psychological state also implied by 'swooning'. Davie doesn't read the ambiguity as mimicking either scene or speaker, however, but as foregrounding the way that the language of the poem operates 'powerfully to drive the reader on from line to line,

²⁸ *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Penguin, 1961), p. 78.

forcing home to him just how poetry moves and must move always forward through time' (p. 101). The poem's own unfolding is foregrounded at the expense of mimesis.

Davie is sceptical that the utilization of this procedure is exclusively symbolist. He quotes from Spenser's *Prothalamion* and concludes that 'the specifically symbolist version of this ancient resource is yet to be inquired for' (p. 96). Yet he does concede that the French symbolists, with their 'ideal of poetic music as a function of poetic syntax' (p. 96), placed a particular emphasis on the temporal aspect of language, and he identifies 'the perpetual present tense which is the tense of a symbolist poem, where words do not stand for events but *are* those events' (p. 196). Mallarmé proposed a composition based on this particular awareness of language in 'Le livre, instrument spirituel':

Un jet de grandeur, de pensée ou d'émoi, considérable, phrase poursuivie, en gros caractère, une ligne par page à emplacement gradué, ne maintiendrait-il le lecteur, en haleine, la durée du livre, avec appel à sa puissance d'enthousiasme. (*Oeuvres*, 298)

The drama is not a drama described but the drama of reading itself. Eliot was aware of Mallarmé as a prime exponent of this language consciousness before he wrote *The Waste Land*. In 'Modern Tendencies in Poetry' (1920) he praised Mallarmé as a poet who 'called attention to the fact the actual writing of poetry, the accident and syntax, is a very difficult part of the problem', adding that 'Mallarmé gets his modernity, his sincerity, simply by close attention to the actual writing'. His influence, 'though it has not been powerful here, has been beneficial', he concluded ('MTP', 14). Then in an article of 1926, 'Note sur Mallarmé et Poe', he elaborated further on this project in the work of Edgar Allan Poe as well as the French poet:

L'effort pour restituer la puissance du Mot, qui inspire la syntaxe de l'un et de l'autre et leur fait écarter le sonore pur ou le pur mélodieux (qu'ils pourraient tous les deux, s'ils le voulaient, si bien exploiter), cet effort, qui empêche le lecteur *d'avalier d'un coup* leur phrase ou leur vers, est une des qualités qui rapprochent le mieux les deux poètes.²⁹

Eliot describes an exploitation of the temporal aspect of language that aims to prevent the reader '*d'avalier d'un coup* leur phrase ou leur vers'. He is aware of the experiential

²⁹ *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 14, 158 (1 novembre 1926), p. 526.

drama of reading and also of the way that this awareness can vitiate continuities and foreground the word as a discrete, though powerful, unit.

Davie aims in his discussion of 'A Game of Chess' to demonstrate that, contrary to much polemic against poets with affinities to symbolism, Eliot is thinking like recent philosophers about 'how far language can be trusted' (p. 102). Davie's argument is a reminder that the symbolism, modernism and postmodernism of literary history overlap in ways that the polemic of literary criticism often prefers to ignore. All these periods or movements share 'the discovery that words may have meanings though they don't have referents' (p. 204). The doubt that symbolism casts on the referential function of language tends to disqualify Empson's reading of 'troubled, confused' as relating the 'stirring of things' in the room that is being described. It is compatible, however, with his other reading, which relates the ambiguity to the state of the observer. Language is here portrayed as symptomatic of a speaker rather than referential. An inconsistency in the poem's referential logic encourages the reader to fill the gap with a third term - the psychology of the speaker. Munguía coincides with this reading when he describes the use of allusion in *The Waste Land* as expressing the author's 'modo de ser'. Davie himself applies this psychological reading of symbolist method in a discussion of 'Prufrock':

When Eliot compares a fog with a cat, or an evening sky with an etherized patient, the object of the exercise, for him, is to leave the gap [between them] wide open. Only in this way can he incite the reader to close the gap for himself, by deducing from the two terms given the third term which is missing, the state of mind of the observer, Prufrock, who sees a similarity where none exists. (p. 200)

Davie's interpretation of symbolist strategy is indebted to an essay by M. H. McLuhan, 'Tennyson and Picturesque Poetry'. McLuhan argues that romantic and picturesque artists looked to the outside world for correlatives of personal, emotional experience. As the nineteenth century progressed, however, they exercised this technique with decreasing concern for the exact composition of the outside world and an increasing responsiveness to inner urgings. A technique of 'inner landscape' resulted:

The technique of inner landscape not only permits the use of any and every kind of experience and object, it insures a much higher degree of control over the effect; because the arrangement of the landscape is the formula of the emotion and can be repeatedly adjusted until the formula and the effect are in precise accord. Whereas the romantic poet and painter was much more dependent on the caprices

of external nature [. . .] The romantic and picturesque artists had to take advantage of accidents. After Baudelaire there is no need for such accidents.³⁰

As Davie avers, 'the change, I suspect, was hardly such sheer gain all round' (p. 206). An outer world that is no more than the symptom of an inner results in loss of meaning for both, an experience of which *The Waste Land* provides evidence. Davie's comments both entertain McLuhan's contrast of inner and outer landscape and suggest a further development of the argument. The connection that he makes between the symbolist attack on reference and more recent philosophical thinking about language implies that while the symbolist interest in language and the discontinuities of syntax can be made to serve an art of psychological presentation, it need not be confined exclusively to this purpose. The workings of language have an interest all their own. Davie applies both readings to Eliot, which is appropriate, I think, for Eliot's own dual interest in poetry as the product of deep emotional experience – he praised Tennyson's *In Memoriam* for its 'logic of the emotions' –³¹ but also as a verbal artefact – 'a medium and not a personality' (*SW*, 46).

Both pressing emotional experience and a startling lineation that belongs to the 'high aesthetic' line of symbolism are apparent in the disturbing motions that open 'The Burial of the Dead':

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain. (*CPP*, 61)

The disturbance is generated by Eliot's use of lineation which isolates the present participles at the end of each line. The new momentum that each participle initiates after the comma finds itself reaching into a blank space that separates verb from the noun that is its object, the ground of its action: 'breeding / Lilacs...'; 'mixing / Memory...'; 'stirring / Dull roots...'. Eliot exploits that disjunction, the blank space into which the generative force of the verbs seems to expand before the subsequent line retrospectively reins them in to the normal run of predication. Davie quotes Mallarmé as a theorist of this conception of white space:

³⁰ *Essays in Criticism*, 1, 3 (July 1951), p. 281.

³¹ "The Voice of his Time", *Listener*, 27, 683 (12 February 1942), p. 212.

L'armature intellectuelle du poème se dissimule et tient – a lieu – dans l'espace qui isole les strophes et parmi le blanc du papier: significatif silence qu'il n'est pas moins beau de composer que les vers. (p. 100)

Eliot demonstrated a similar concern when he wrote Flores to advise:

I should be very glad if you could see that the same spacing is observed in the translation as in the original; for I attach great importance to spacing. (MS VE, 22 February 1928)

In the opening passage of 'The Burial of the Dead', the relation between the present participles and the subsequent phrases that tie them to the description of an outer event is disturbed by the space between the lines. For a moment at the end of each line the reader is confronted with the pure actions - 'breeding', 'mixing', 'stirring' – which project their energies disturbingly. That disturbance lends itself to the psychological reading of disjunction that is one of Davie's responses to the symbolist Eliot, a conflation of inner and outer processes. An anxious sense of natural processes in transformation reads as the correlative of a fear of inner transformation. It is a fear that manifests itself in the repeated occurrence of the verb 'to dare' in Eliot's early poems, from 'Do I dare / Disturb the universe?' in 'Prufrock' to 'the awful daring of a moment's surrender' in 'What the Thunder Said' and the 'Eyes I dare not meet in dreams' of *The Hollow Men* (CPP, 14, 74, & 83). Explicit theme depends on the fragmentary formal strategies that Eliot adopts from symbolism.

As I have argued above, Manguía's introduction gives prominence to the theme of affect, and he is aware of anxiety at work in Eliot's poem, claiming that while the animistic lapse of modern life is accepted by a Proust,

para Eliot, poeta y no novelista, puritano y, por ende, anglosajón, lo aterran y atormentan. Este terror y este tormento son la esencia de su mejor poema: *The Waste Land*. (Manguía, 12)

There is little evidence of this anxiety, however, in the opening lines of 'El entierro de los muertos':

Abril es el mes más cruel: arbustos de lilas engendra sobre yermos muertos, mezcla al deseo con el recuerdo, agita incoloras raíces con las lluvias de primavera. (p. 15)

The startling present participles of ‘breeding’, ‘mixing’, ‘stirring’ are transformed to present simple verbs, ‘engendra’, ‘mezcla’, ‘agita’; actions that unfold in a continuous present become distanced as they are framed in a tense that describes either characteristics or repeated actions. The ‘permanent present tense’ of the symbolist poem that telescopes the time of the event described into the time of the poem’s unfolding has been lost. Those present simple verbs refer to a time spread out beyond the present moment; they maintain the distance of empirical observation where Eliot’s participles participated in a drama of troubled identification between speaker, reader, and the processes being both described and enacted on the page. Eliot set lineation against the run of predication; here that disjunction has been smoothed over, and so the psychological insight of which it was a symptom is lost. The capacity of Eliot’s symbolist practice to register psychology makes the portrayal of sensibility a central theme of *The Waste Land*. The style of the poetry is not descriptive so much as expressive. Munguía’s introduction registers this insight, but his prose translation fails to offer the stylistic means of portraying a sensibility in crisis. Flores did not fare much better, also choosing present simple verbs for Eliot’s participles:

Abril es el mes más cruel; engendra
Lilas de la tierra muerta, mezcla
Memorias y anhelos, remueve
Raíces perezosas con lluvias primaverales. (Flores, 13)

Paz would not experience the impact and specific implications of this passage until he read Eliot’s poem in English.

Munguía recognized that *The Waste Land* was ‘fragmentario y criptográfico’ in his introduction (p. 13), but he was unable to realize the implications of this observation in his translation. Syntactic effects can be impossible to translate since they depend on the structures of a given language. The example that Davie cites of ‘troubled, confused . . .’, for example, simply doesn’t go into Spanish. Munguía clearly spotted the effect, since he cleverly hedged his bets, translating ‘troubled’ as adjectival and ‘confused’ as verbal: ‘se escondían sus raros perfumes sintéticos - ungüentos, polvos, líquidos -, *desarmado, confundiendo*, ahogando los sentidos en olores’ [my italics] (Munguía, 19). Yet the other examples that I have discussed do not reflect inherent differences between Spanish and English but Munguía’s limitations and the limitation that he imposed upon himself when he decided to translate Eliot’s poem into prose.

I have dedicated a substantial part of this chapter to Donald Davie and his discussion of effects in *The Waste Land* that were not in fact active in the text of 'El páramo'. My aim has been in part to open up the disparity between Manguía's well-informed introduction and his translation. This gap, between a stimulating commentary and a limited text, itself provides a space for a young writer such as Paz to intervene with his own articulation of the poem's themes. Davie's approach also becomes increasingly relevant to Paz's reading of Eliot beyond 'El páramo'. Davie brings a poet's interest in the formal properties of verse to his comparison of Eliot with Valéry and Mallarmé, an interest which Paz, himself a formally aware poet, must share. The French symbolists, and in particular Paul Valéry, are an active part of the horizon of expectations that is applied to T. S. Eliot by Mexican readers, as I will demonstrate in Chapters Two and Three. Mexicans shared a number of French influences with Eliot, and the general tendency towards 'inner landscape' that M. H. McLuhan describes will be one feature of Paz's reading of *The Waste Land*.

Given the attraction that Paz described towards the 'novedad' and 'extrañeza' of 'El páramo' he cannot have been completely excluded from a sense of *The Waste Land*'s form. Yet the clumsiness with which Manguía rendered this aspect of Eliot's poem would tend to guide the reader in certain directions. One tendency is to read the fragmentary form as emblematic of fragmentation in society rather than as the poem's *modus operandi*, or as a particular type of experience for the reader. The lack of links that transcend the material fragments stand as metaphor for a world that lacks transcendental values. This reading is vulnerable to crude political appropriation, which certainly exerts pressure on Paz's early prose even if he never succumbs to it entirely. Certainly, Paz's leftist political reading of Eliot recedes in his later career when he comes to read him in English. Another tendency is to use the translation as a source of images which are not so readily distorted by the transfer between languages. The images of dryness and thirst that reach their climax in the water-dripping song of 'The Burial of the Dead' make regular occurrences in Paz's poems throughout his career. Manguía's introduction drew attention to the importance of thirst and water in the poem and elaborated on their significance:

A través de todo el poema, delira el poeta de sed [...] - ¿Quizá sea el agua símbolo de aquella piedad que no tenemos nosotros? – El agua es libertad cuando se transforma en nieve y cubre a la montaña con nepente; el agua es amor cuando fluye suavemente por el río y atrae a los amantes; la danza de la lluvia en las

praderas durante el mes de abril equivale al abandono irresponsable de la juventud; el agua, por fin, cuando es océano causa “entre cuchicheos la más discreta muerte”. (p. 13)

The reader might struggle to recognize much of Eliot’s poem in this description. Manguía elaborates on the image, much as Paz will do in his own poems. Yet it is hard not to be disappointed that images of thirst provide such a persistent aspect of Eliot’s influence on Paz. Brian Howard described an understandable reaction to the prevalence of these images in English poems after *The Waste Land*’s publication:

It became such a plague that the moment the eye encountered, in a newly arrived poem, the words “stone”, “dust” or “dry” one reached for the waste-paper basket.³²

Cleanth Brooks also noted that ‘the phrase, “the poetry of drouth”, has become a cliché of left-wing criticism’ (Brooks, 166). Yet Paz’s use of these images does reward more patience than Howard could spare. Manguía rooted the image in the experience of the poet – ‘delira el poeta de sed’ – rather than making it a generalization about society. Paz follows this reading and uses the image in poems such as *Entre la piedra y la flor* (1941) to communicate a sense of desire frustrated which is a personal, emotional experience, but which also activates leftist thinking about the individual in relation to the historical forces that bear in upon him or her. Paz would be inclined to mine ‘El páramo’ for images because they are less damaged by a prose translation than syntax and lineation. Yet he would also be following a tendency among Hispanic poets, such as Pablo Neruda and Antonio Machado, to establish an imagistic or symbolic vocabulary that provides a form of ritualistic litany for their poems. For Machado’s ‘camino’ or Neruda’s ‘ríos’ and ‘piedras’, one finds ‘agua’ in Paz and also ‘espejo’ which have clear antecedents in *The Waste Land* and the ‘wilderness of mirrors’ (CPP, 38) of ‘Gerontion’.

‘El páramo’ offers a compromised knowledge of *The Waste Land*, suggesting its themes, but offering little evidence of the formal innovations that manifest and develop those themes. In the February 1931 edition of *Contemporáneos*, however, a verse translation by the Spanish poet León Felipe appeared of *The Hollow Men* (1925). Eliot’s poem follows a pattern in which a presence is offered only to be voided:

³² Quoted in Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 128.

Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless. (CPP, 83)

It is a pattern that works through the lineation: the first two lines offer voices that ‘whisper’, and as one turns the line-end one imagines this as a presence; the ensuing line, however, forces the reader to retrospectively dampen that presence as ‘quiet’ and then to negate it as ‘meaningless’. Something has happened in the space between the lines. Felipe replicates the strategy:

Y nuestras voces ásperas
cuando cuchicheamos
no tienen timbre ni sentido. (Felipe, 132)

Hugh Kenner declared that *The Hollow Men* ‘speak an admirably disciplined prose, rather closer to distinction than that of a *Times* leader’, and argued of the passage cited above that ‘only once, with that dangling “when,” does the lineation venture to evade the grammatical structure’.³³ His comparison of lineation and sense unit is well executed, but he fails to register the dramatic progression between anticipation and disappointed realization that the reader experiences as he or she moves from ‘whisper together’ in one line to ‘meaningless’ in the next. Kenner wishes to make a point about the hollow men themselves: they ‘epiphanize the flaccid forbearance of an upper-middleclass twentieth-century community, where no one speaks loudly’ (pp.161-2). The poem is not about the hollow men, however, so much as the experience of reading about them, about the way that one line will confound the expectation generated by its predecessor - ‘words do not stand for events but *are* those events’ (Davie, 196). Christopher Ricks rightly takes Kenner to task for his satirical reading of Eliot’s poem. Yet his own conclusion that the poem ‘is affecting as a triumph of affectlessness, a movement away from wrong feeling but into a feeling of feelinglessness’ also fails to register the movement that the reader experiences as they follow the poem’s drama.³⁴ Certainly, the effects of the poem are muted. Nevertheless, there is a movement, however attenuated, between positive and negative, presence and absence, and this is precisely what Felipe replicates and what Paz takes from the poem, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Four. His use of *The Hollow Men* as a formal example that seems to be

³³ *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot* (London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 157 & 158.

³⁴ *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 216.

saying one thing but then turns out to be saying another implies more than a simple portrait of affectlessness. The experience is dramatized of a search for meaning that can't be found, or of a desire that is never satisfied. Eliot's disjunctive form allows Paz to write a sense of constriction into a poetry that aspires for freedom, and thus, as I shall argue, enables him to connect Eliot with both a Marxist search for liberty and an emerging Mexican tradition of *antipoesía*. It is this dramatization of the perceiving and desiring consciousness that grounds Paz's reading of Eliot and saves it from mere generality about the awfulness of modern life.

The final section of Eliot's poem provides a summary of the experience that its lineation provides:

Entre la idea
y la realidad
entre el movimiento
y el acto
cae la sombra. (Felipe, 135-6)

Each 'entre' suggests a point of connection, or relation, only to be revealed as division; a lesson neatly structured by the line breaks. Felipe replicates Eliot's lineation exactly, and the inversion 'falls the shadow' settles naturally in Spanish syntax. The 'entre' of the passage is highly suggestive, with multiple applications which correspond in part to its multiple source in Shakespeare's *Julius Ceasar* and Paul Valéry's *Le Cimetière marin*.³⁵ It can apply to a fissure within consciousness, or between consciousness and world, between thought and action, feeling and response or between moments of an individual's experience. It can be applied beyond *The Hollow Men* to the experience of *The Waste Land*, and it is arguably a stronger presence in the early Paz than any single detail from Eliot's longer poem. Paz adopts the 'entre' of 'Los hombres huecos' as a constant in his poems and prose.

The enduring attraction of this passage for Paz can be explained in part by its liturgical form, which anticipates poems by Pablo Neruda and Xavier Villaurrutia as well as a tendency towards ritual expression in Paz's own later works. I would also suggest that it attracts precisely because it has such a general application. Eliot was presented to Paz as the foremost poet writing in English. Manguía declares that 'ocupa

³⁵ Eliot remarks that Valéry's "Entre le vid et l'événement pur..." [...] suggests so strongly though accidentally Brutus's [...] "Between the acting of a dreadful thing..." in 'A Brief Introduction to the Method of Paul Valéry', introduction to *Le Serpent* by Paul Valéry, trans. by Mark Wardle (London: Criterion, 1924), p. 10.

Thomas Stearns Eliot entre los anglosajones contemporáneos rango destacado, brillante' (Munguía, 7), and for Flores 'la crítica contemporánea denomina "Período Eliot" "(Eliotite Age)" a los dos lustros que se extienden del 1920 al 1930' (Flores, 7). Such uncontested praise of a writer comes easily when they have built their career, and so provoked hostile debate, in a foreign country. Reception of Paz in the anglophone world as 'incontestably Latin America's foremost living poet' provides a similar example.³⁶ There is a natural tendency to read such exalted and distant figures as somehow representative of an age or a geographical area and so to look to them for images and truths of a more general application than one would expect of more familiar writers.

Paz never differentiates very strongly between *The Hollow Men* and *The Waste Land*, and Eliot's later poem may well have grown from stray drafts for the earlier one. The desert landscape of *The Hollow Men* revisits the scenery of 'What the Thunder Said'. Yet it also moves closer to Paz and to Mexico. The exotic landscape of Eliot's 'cactus land' was, if not a natural landscape for Paz living in the outskirts of Mexico City, at least a familiar one in Mexican national mythology. Manuel Durán, editing 'Los hombres huecos' in 1973, assumed when he encountered 'no damos más que vueltas al nopal' (Felipe, 135) that it was not Eliot who had changed 'mulberry bush' to 'prickly pear' (CPP, 85) but Felipe who 'mexicaniza muy adecuadamente el texto'.³⁷ Felipe's translation underlines this coincidence by capitalizing 'valle' in 'este Valle de estrellas moribundas' (Felipe, 135), suggesting 'El Valle de México' where Eliot's location had been purposefully indeterminate. Once the poem has been placed in the heart of ancient Aztec civilization, the 'estrellas moribundas' naturally extend their reference to the now departed astrological beliefs of pre-Columbian civilization. Thus the poem comes to overlay ancient and modern civilizations, much as *The Waste Land* had done.

Paz was hostile to what he perceived as the Christian 'ideas y esperanzas' ('TSE', 41) behind *The Waste Land*. Yet there is a moment in Felipe's translation of *The Hollow Men* that draws a rather different picture of Eliot. The 'Let me be no nearer' (CPP, 84) of Eliot's text is translated as 'No quiero entrar más allá' (Felipe, 133) which, with the association of 'el más allá' in Spanish as the life beyond death, implies a rejection of transcendence. This implied rejection ties in with the ambivalent attitude that Eliot's earliest poems express towards transformation with their litany of 'dare',

³⁶ *Collected Poems 1957-1987*, trans. by Eliot Weinberger and others (London: Paladin, 1991), back cover.

³⁷ *Antología de la revista Contemporáneos* (México: FCE, 1973), p. 55n.

which appears in this poem as 'Eyes I dare not meet in dreams' (CPP, 83). Felipe's mistranslation is a reminder that Eliot remained preoccupied with this-worldly experience rather than dictates from a dimly perceived other realm. Even after his conversion to the Anglican Church of 1928 Eliot's *Marina* could receive praise from William Empson for 'the balance maintained between otherworldliness and humanism'.³⁸

Paz does not mention 'Los hombres huecos' by name in his speech to the Ingersoll Foundation, although he cites the passage 'Between the idea / And the reality ...' as an example of 'el horror ante el mundo moderno' that he shared with Eliot ('TSE', 41). He commonly refers to *The Hollow Men* as if it were a part of *The Waste Land*, rather than a separate poem. The Eliot that he first encounters is an odd composite. From Manguía's introduction he learns of a poem that is the product of the failed sensibility of 'el hombre cultivado de nuestra época'. The historical location of that sensibility renders the poem accessible to a leftist critique of modernity. Manguía's actual translation then gives an indistinct sense of the fragmentary form that embodies the poem's portrait of affective experience. Paz's early sense of *The Waste Land* seems more indebted to Manguía's introduction than to his translation. 'Los hombres huecos' does then provide a formal model which Paz can imitate as well as, in the 'entre' passage, a summary of both that form and the psychological disjointedness that Manguía's introduction to 'El páramo' had described. Felipe's translation exemplifies the content of Manguía's introduction which the text of 'El páramo' had failed to realize. Paz would then at some time in the ensuing years read the Ángel Flores translation, *Tierra baldía*. Flores provides a much better idea of *The Waste Land* as a poem, rather than as a deformed novel. Nevertheless, one has to wait until Paz travels to the United States in 1944 and studies Eliot's poem in English to find sustained examples of the *The Waste Land's* form in his own work.

Looking back in 1988, Paz declared of *The Waste Land*:

A través de tantos años y mutaciones, ese poema sigue siendo para mí un obelisco cubierto de signos, invulnerables ante los vaivenes del gusto y las vicisitudes del tiempo. ('TSE', 40)

³⁸ *Argufying: Essays on Literature and Culture* (London: Hogarth, 1988), p. 356.

‘Sigue siendo’ implies that this reading is not retrospective so much as an initial response that has stayed with him. It argues that Eliot’s poem has endured, but it also suggests that it has continued to resist interpretation. Can those signs be deciphered? *The Waste Land* has continued to defy critical efforts to establish a definitive interpretation. Yet there is a corollary to this situation: the poem’s ultimate undecidability continues to provoke new interpretations as new readers bring their own interests to bear upon it. I will now ask how some of the poems, and thinking about poems, which were active for a Mexican reader in 1930 such as Octavio Paz bore upon his first encounters with T. S. Eliot in Spanish.

Chapter Two

Precursors

The previous chapter aimed to establish what Jauss describes as the ‘potential for meaning’ (p. 30) of ‘El páramo’ and ‘Los hombres huecos’. I now wish to explore the ways that this potential is realized as meaning in relation to the poems and debates about poems that circulate in Mexico as T. S. Eliot appears. How does Manguía’s version compare stylistically with the poems that came before it? How does it conform to and modify the assumptions then held by a Mexican reader such as Paz about what a poem could do and how it should be read? The next two chapters consider answers to these questions. In ‘Precursors’ I will discuss some of the work that pre-dates Eliot’s appearance: *modernismo*, Ramón López Velarde, and the early Salvador Novo. In the following chapter, ‘Contemporaries’, I will look at works that form the Mexican Eliot’s peer group rather than his ancestry. I focus on the writers that contributed to *Contemporáneos*, the magazine in which Eliot appeared, and also on the writers that they in turn read and translated alongside Eliot. These works all create the immediate tradition into which Eliot is received; they establish the terms in which he can both conform and dissent, in which he can be read. I do not wish to provide exhaustive critical assessments of literary movements such as *modernismo* as if they were self-contained achievements; rather, they are viewed as malleable embodiments of ongoing preoccupations that will be taken up by later writers in a variety of forms. The emphasis lies not on Spanish American literature as a whole, but on aspects of the tradition that Paz as an aspiring writer in Mexico City of the 1930s would have encountered. Key figures of the *vanguardia* such as César Vallejo and Vicente Huidobro receive only cursory treatment since they are barely mentioned in Paz’s early prose writings. In fact, T.S. Eliot provides an alternative *vanguardia* for those Mexican poets who were looking for a route out of *modernismo*.

Modernismo was the dominant literary movement in Spanish America prior to Eliot’s appearance in Spanish translation, and Paz recalls in interview that the *modernista* poets ‘ocupaban un lugar destacado en los libreros’ (PC, 79) of his grandfather’s library which introduced him to literature. The movement’s genesis is

usually located in 1882 or 1888, the respective publication dates of José Martí's *Ismaelillo*, and Ruben Darío's *Azul*. As these dates imply, *modernismo* is a misleading cognate of Anglo-American modernism, and in *Los hijos del limo* Paz separates the two terms:

Hacia 1880 surge en Hispanoamérica el movimiento que llamamos *modernismo*. Aquí conviene hacer una pequeña aclaración: el modernismo hispanoamericano es, hasta cierto punto, un equivalente del Parnaso y del simbolismo francés, de modo que no tiene nada que ver con lo que en lengua inglesa se llama *modernism*. Este último designa a los movimientos literarios y artísticos que se inician en la segunda década del siglo XX; el *modernism* de los críticos norteamericanos e ingleses no es sino lo que en Francia y en los países hispánicos se llama *vanguardia*. (*Hijos*, 128)¹

The assertion that the Spanish term 'no tiene nada que ver' with the English one will seem like an overzealous distinction to a criticism which, since work such as Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* (1942) and Frank Kermode's *Romantic Image* (1971), has become accustomed to tracing the origins of Anglo-American modernism back into nineteenth-century France. Once one has accepted the basis of Paz's assertion - the fact that the two terms are staggered historically - much can be found in *modernismo* that, due to a shared lineage in French symbolism, provides a fruitful context for Eliot's reception. Many of the assumptions of *modernista* practice are shared by Eliot's work, and it is out of this partial correspondence that Paz will generate his own interpretations. Of course, *modernismo* itself was not a single entity. Jean Franco warns that 'generalisations about Modernism [*modernismo*] are particularly dangerous because the poets did not form a coherent movement with a definite poetic creed'.² Yet Saúl Yurkievich argues that, although they never formed a movement as such, the *modernista* poets did share many assumptions: 'Están imbuídos de las mismas ideas y creencias. La diferencia no reside en la visión del mundo o en la poética sino en su realización verbal.'³ I will now explore the ways in which these shared assumptions, both theoretical and stylistic, acted as precursors of Eliot's appearance in Mexico.

For the writers of *Contemporáneos* who published Eliot, *modernismo* was identified with verbal excess. Xavier Villaurrutia, in the introduction to his selection of

¹ Throughout my study I will employ the term '*modernismo*' to designate the Spanish American and 'modernism' the Anglo-American movement.

² *An Introduction to Spanish-American Literature*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 126.

³ *Celebración del modernismo* (Barcelona: Tusquets Editor, 1976), p. 58.

Ramón López Velarde's poems, censures 'el amor a lo decorativo por lo decorativo, que es un vicio de la poesía "modernista"'.⁴ Nevertheless, in 'El caracol y la sirena (Rubén Darío)' (1964) Paz concedes that 'la vanguardia de 1925 y las tentativas de la poesía contemporánea están íntimamente ligadas a ese gran comienzo'.⁵ Much of the impact of *modernismo* derives from this sense that it was foundational. It thus stands in relation to subsequent Spanish American production much as romanticism did to Anglo-American modernism and to Eliot in particular. Whether the attitude to it be acquiescent, belligerent, or a self-deluding combination of the two, it was what stood before, demanding some response. Spanish America had not assimilated the first wave of romanticism that had so dominated in Germany, England and France. In his 'Introducción a la historia de la poesía mexicana' (1950), Paz complains that nineteenth-century Mexican writers 'lo prolongan [al romanticismo] en sus aspectos más superficiales y se entregan a una literatura elocuente y sentimental'.⁶ *Modernismo* brought a vigour to Spanish American poetry that had been absent since the baroque period. It also brought Spanish American poets into contact with that romantic tradition of Hugo and Baudelaire, then the Parnassians and symbolists, that they had failed to assimilate earlier.

Quite apart from the specifically artistic preoccupations of *modernismo*, the movement coincided with material developments in the dissemination of literary culture that would provide a framework for Eliot's later reception. The 1890s see the birth of the literary periodical in Latin America, with Mexico City and Buenos Aires as the chief publishing centres. Mexico produced both the *Revista Azul* and the *Revista Moderna*, founding a tradition that later periodicals such as *Contemporáneos* and Paz's own *Taller* would inhabit. The creation of these magazines both reflected and helped to promote a new status and independence for literary production. They provided a space in which literature could become aware of itself, fostering a culture of experiment that anticipates the avant-garde; Guillermo Sheridan actually asserts that 'la historia del vanguardismo es la de sus revistas' (p. 365). The self-consciousness and aestheticism that seem to estrange the *modernistas* from their social context were thus, paradoxically, facilitated by historical changes in publishing.

⁴ *El león y la virgen* (1st edn, 1942; Mexico: UNAM, 1971), p. xviii.

⁵ *Cuadrivio* (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1965; Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1991), p. 8.

⁶ *Las peras del olmo*, 3rd edn (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1990), p. 20.

The *modernistas* were more aware of their social environment than they are sometimes given credit for. José Martí, in his preface to J. A. Pérez Bonalde's 'El poema de Niágara' (1882), recognized the new culture of experiment, and unhesitatingly linked it to changes in contemporary society:

Ahora los árboles de la selva no tienen más hojas que lenguas las ciudades; las ideas se maduran en la playa en que se enseñan, y andando mano a mano, y de pie en pie. El hablar no es pecado, sino gala: el oír no es herejía, sino gusto y hábito y moda. Se tienen el oído puesto a todo; los pensamientos no bien germinan, ya están cargados de flores y de frutos, y saltando en el papel, y entrándose, como polvo sutil, por todas las mentes; los ferrocarriles echan abajo la selva, los diarios la selva humana. Penetra el sol por las hendiduras de los árboles viejos. Todo es expansión, comunicación, florecencia, contagio, esparcimiento. El periódico desflora las ideas grandiosas. Las ideas no hacen familia en la mente, como antes, ni larga vida. Nacen a caballo, montadas en relámpago, con alas. No crecen en una mente sola, sino por el comercio de todas. No tardan en beneficiar, después de salida trabajosa, a número escaso de lectores; sino que, apenas nacidas, benefician.⁷

These changes are exhilarating, and Martí's prose itself articulates the energy of the processes at work: 'expansión, comunicación, florecencia, contagio, esparcimiento'. Flowering and scattering imply organic processes, just as the proliferation of languages in modern cities has its analogy in the organic image of leaves on a tree. Yet the trees give way to the new railways as the human forest is razed by the daily newspaper. Although 'moda' had generally positive connotations in this period, there is loss as well as gain in a culture where heresy has become fashion, and ideas are exchanged before they can be assimilated. Only a modest shift of perspective is required for these organic metaphors - which portray the processes of change as generative and cohesive - to disappear, leaving the vision of *The Waste Land*, which is uncohesive and fragmentary. Although quite different in their responses, Martí and Eliot share an essentially historicist consciousness of modernity that Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane describe:

The word ['modern'] retains its force because of its association with a characteristic contemporary feeling: the historicist feeling that we live in totally novel times, that contemporary history is the source of our significance, that we are derivatives not of the past but of the surrounding and enfolding environment or scenario, that modernity is a new consciousness, a fresh condition of the human mind.⁸

⁷ *Obras completas*, 2nd edn, vol. 7 (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975), p. 227.

⁸ *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 22.

Martí's attitude to this enfolding environment was generally positive, but Federico de Onís argues that *modernismo* was yet another manifestation of the same historical crisis that pre-dated Anglo-American modernism. *Modernismo* was

la forma hispánica de la crisis universal de las letras y del espíritu que inicia hacia 1885 la disolución del siglo XIX y que se había de manifestar en el arte, la ciencia, la religión, la política y gradualmente en los demás aspectos de la vida entera.⁹

Modernista poets felt unhoused in the contemporary worlds of both organized religion and secular society - the worlds of heresy and fashion to use Martí's terms. Rubén Darío rejected the Christian church's condemnation of sexual love as sinful, and looked to occult religions for their veneration of the erotic, while works such as 'El Rey Burgués' (1888) portrayed the poet as a social outcast.

This hostile turn of the historicist consciousness provides a broadly welcoming context for Eliot's poems. The specific forms that this turn took in *modernista* works, however, provide ambivalent precursors. There is a tendency to find compensation for the material conditions of the poet's existence in an ideal realm - the 'bosque ideal que lo real complica' of Darío.¹⁰ Victor Hugo provided a model for the Spanish Americans of the poet as seer who mediated between the divine and the earthly; and from Schopenhauer they had learnt that the contemplation of eternal ideas could provide a means of transcending historical determinism. Such a faith in an opposition between real and ideal has helped to engender the caricatured view of *modernista* works as escapist and inveterately fantastical. For Paz, *The Waste Land's* significance lay in bringing a specifically historical reality back into the poem: 'El simbolismo había expulsado a la historia del poema; con *The Waste Land* regresa al poema el tiempo histórico, concreto' ('TSE', 41).¹¹ The opposition between Eliot and the *modernistas* seems clear. Yet the faith of Darío and his contemporaries was not simply directed at a divine realm beyond the poem and society. It was a faith in the poem and the poetic word itself. *Modernismo* drew as much on the aestheticist lineage of Poe, Baudelaire (who declared in 'Théophile

⁹ 'Sobre el concepto del modernismo', in his *España en América* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1955), p. 176.

¹⁰ 'Yo soy aquel que ayer no más decía...', *Poesías completas*, vol. 1 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1967), p. 629.

¹¹ Given Paz's definition of *modernismo* as an equivalent of French symbolism in the passage cited earlier from *Los hijos del limo*, I have taken his use of the term 'simbolistas' here to include Spanish American poets such as Darío.

Gautier' that 'Il y a dans le mot, dans le *verbe*, quelque chose de *sacré*') and Mallarmé, for whom 'tout, au monde, existe pour aboutir à un livre', as on the vatic stance of Hugo.¹² Darío himself, in 'Dilucidaciones' (1907), returned to the Gospel of St. John:

En el principio está la palabra como única representación. No simplemente como signo, puesto que no hay antes nada que representar. En el principio está la palabra como manifestación de la unidad infinita, pero ya conteniéndola. *Et verbum erat Deus*. (Darío, vol. 2, 699)

And the word was God. The word does not describe an ideal that lies beyond and before but is itself the embodiment of the ideal. Gwen Kirkpatrick summarizes this aesthetic turn in terms of the referential function of language:

As they reject the referential emphasis on language and turn away from "realism" and civic poetry, the *modernista* poets idealize poetry as a striving towards beauty and the ideal. The cult of the exotic, the emphasis on sonority, the enrichment of poetic meter, the delight in verbal play for its own sake, helped create for the *modernistas* a self-containment for poetry, setting it off from the everyday, communicative function of language.¹³

Kirkpatrick captures both the play and the seriousness of the verbal experiment of the *modernista* poets. The word could embody a divine ideal but it could also take part in an 'erótica del lenguaje como cuerpo', as Guillermo Sucre describes it. Yet pleasure brings knowledge: 'Con el goce del lenguaje, ¿no empieza simultáneamente la conciencia que se tiene de él?'¹⁴

Paz read *The Waste Land* against the aestheticism of the *modernistas* as a poem that dealt with history. Yet the language consciousness that Kirkpatrick and Sucre describe does in fact anticipate a work that generates its meanings through formal fragmentation rather than direct statement. The young Paz was struck by *The Waste Land* as an aesthetic entity: 'La forma del poema era inusitada' ('TSE', 40). While Manguía's prose translation inevitably attenuated this form at the levels of line-ending and syntax, it nevertheless preserved cuts from scene to scene, and from speaker to speaker; and his introduction places the poem explicitly within Edmund Wilson's 'serious-aesthetic tradition of symbolism', describing Eliot as 'disciplinado como Paul Valéry en la observación de métodos y formas' (p. 7). Both *The Waste Land* and *The*

¹² Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968), p. 464; Mallarmé, 'Le livre, un instrument spirituel' (*Oeuvres*, 294).

¹³ *The Dissonant Legacy of Modernismo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 34.

¹⁴ 'Poesía hispanoamericana y conciencia del lenguaje', *Eco*, 198-200 (abril-junio 1978), pp. 619 & 620.

Hollow Men, require an aesthetically sophisticated reading that can interpret formal disruption. As I will argue in Chapter Four, it is just this reading that Paz demonstrates in one of his first poems, 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada' (1931), which replicates Eliot's formal pattern of aspiration and negation. It is also an attitude to precursor work that partially circumvents the Bloomian presence of vision. An aesthetic approach allows Paz to separate formal qualities of Eliot's work and to employ them instrumentally.

The *modernistas* were aware of historical conflict and their work was predicated on a hostility to the society of the 'Rey Burgués'. Where the form of Eliot's poem articulates this sense of discord, however, the verb that Jean Franco employs for Paz's Spanish American precursors is quite different: 'they learned to sublimate the conflicts and variety of the real world into verbal syntheses or symbols' (p. 125). The poem provides a space in which historical, material conflict can be transformed. Franco continues: 'in the poem conflict and harmony could exist like the different notes in a chord'. Harmony is a central metaphor for the *modernistas*. *The Waste Land*, however, answers this metaphor with that of the fragment, a rhetoric that Munguía adopts in his description of Eliot's poem as 'fragmentario y criptográfico' (p. 13). For Munguía, Eliot's vision precludes the possibility of harmonizing conflict: 'sin que exista la posibilidad de reunir armoniosamente en un todo sistematizado a estos elementos psicológicos que son la base imprescindible de la personalidad, el hombre cultivado se percata, sin poder evitarlo, de una discontinuidad subjetiva y periódica' (p. 11).

This rejection of *modernismo*'s faith in the power of art to sublimate or harmonize conflict brought Eliot's poem within range of the Marxist critique of 'intellectual life process' that lay behind Paz's preoccupation with historical poetry. In his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Marx had turned the hierarchy on its head that portrayed man as master of his circumstance:

The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness [...] The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.¹⁵

¹⁵ Trans. by S. W. Ryazanskaya (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), pp. 20-1.

Poems belong to the superstructure of society. They cannot resolve their base of material, historical circumstance but are determined by it. In Paz's description of *The Waste Land*, 'regresa al poema el tiempo histórico, concreto'. Where *modernista* work had attempted to sublimate or harmonize conflict, Eliot allowed conflict to fragment and disrupt his utterance: artistic form articulates historical circumstance. Paz's political belief thus finds an exemplar in Eliot's *Waste Land* as the historical poem that the *modernistas* failed to produce. Eliot tolerates a reading which confirms the formal sophistication of the *modernistas* yet questions the value that they attached to artistic form. The *modernistas* had witnessed a crisis which they attempted to vitiate with harmony and an independent language. The realization introduced by *The Waste Land* was that language will reflect rather than resolve that cultural crisis. Eliot thus offered a different route out of *modernismo* from the *vanguardia* of Huidobro who, with his injunction to create not imitate, stressed the autonomy of art, and so prolonged the aestheticist stance without a historicist corrective.¹⁶

Eliot's poem was not intended as a Marxist treatise, and in 'Thoughts After Lambeth' (1931) he resisted the interpretation that cast him in crude historical terms as the spokesman for 'the "disillusionment of a generation"' (SE, 368). Nevertheless, he did view words, the poet's material, which for Baudelaire and Darío had been sacred, in more worldly terms. In 'The Perfect Critic' (1920) he invites the reader to contemplate the decline of language over time: 'Compare a mediaeval theologian or mystic, compare a seventeenth-century preacher, with any 'liberal' sermon since Schleiermacher, and you will observe that words have changed their meanings. What they have lost is definite, and what they have gained is indefinite' (SW, 8). In 'The Music of Poetry' (1942), he introduces to an exemplary symbolist theme of transcendent aesthetics factors of contingency and historical change: 'a language is always changing; its developments in vocabulary, in syntax, pronunciation and intonation - even, in the long run, its deterioration - must be accepted by the poet and made the best of' (OPP, 37). He shared the historicist consciousness that Malcolm Bradbury and James Macfarlane described as a defining characteristic of modernism. When Ángel Flores wrote Eliot to ask for permission to publish *Tierra baldía* he described a poem that had found its historical moment: 'The youth of the Spanish-speaking world is in search of new values,

¹⁶ See, for example, *Non serviam* (1914): 'Hemos cantado a la Naturaleza (cosa que a ella bien poco le importa). Nunca hemos creado realidades propias, como ella lo hace o lo hizo en tiempos pasados, cuando era joven y llena de impulsos creadoras', *Obras completas*, vol. 1 (Santiago: Andres Bello, 1976), p. 715.

and I believe that *The Waste Land* in its Spanish avatar will be a welcomed gift from the English language' (MS VE, 30 January 1928). *The Waste Land* is not exclusively historicist, however. There is a psychological element to the poem which militates against the Marxist reading. Does it portray the breakdown of a society or an individual? Paz describes the poem as 'una caída que es, asimismo, una depresión psicológica, una enfermedad de los nervios y un pecado mortal' ('TSE', 41). It is precisely this merging of inner and outer worlds in the poem - 'la fusión del yo subjetivo y el nosotros histórico, mejor dicho, la intersección entre el destino social y el individual' ('TSE', 41) - that makes the poem available for a poet like Paz who combines a broadly lyric tradition (psychology) with Marxist sympathies (history). Eliot thus engages his seemingly antithetical political and poetic interests of the 1930s.

The Waste Land provided a form of negative way for Paz, a model of how little the poem could do to resolve social conflict. Eliot's poem 'contradecía todo lo que yo pensaba que era *moderno* y todo lo que yo creía que era *poético*' ('REM', 42). It was an anti-poem which negated *modernista* works both formally, with its disjointed syntax, and thematically, with its presentation of the erotic as a failed relation rather than as salvation. Paz's general comments on *modernismo* often portray its works as simply decorative. He has little patience with the 'feria de rarezas estereotipadas' (*Cuadrivio*, 57) or 'las joyas falsas de casi todos los modernistas' (*Peras*, 22). Yet his criticism is directed at the followers of the movement rather than its founders. Paz dedicates a sympathetic essay to Darío in *Cuadrivio* (1965), and in *Los hijos del limo* (1974) he acknowledges that the Nicaraguan poet himself initiated the reaction against *modernismo*:

La nota irónica, voluntariamente antipoética y por eso más intensamente poética, aparece precisamente en el momento de mediodía del modernismo (*Cantos de vida y esperanza*, 1905) y aparece casi siempre asociada a la imagen de la muerte. (p. 138)

Saúl Yurkievich describes Darío's collection of 1905 as 'la modernidad tal como la entiende nuestra época' (*Celebración*, 25). 'Augurios' typifies the transition, and provides an example of the way that Spanish American precursors laid a foundation that could accommodate Eliot's more radically anti-rhetorical production some time before his appearance:

Hoy pasó un águila

sobre mi cabeza;
lleva en sus alas
la tormenta,
lleva en sus garras
el rayo que deslumbra y aterra.
¡Oh, águila!
Dame la fortaleza de sentirme en el lodo humano
con alas y fuerzas
para resistir los embates
de las tempestades perversas,
y de arriba las cóleras
y de abajo las roedoras miserias. (Darío, vol. 2, 673)

The passage opens with a restrained idiom that can accommodate, without complicating its syntax, the figurative register of 'Lleva en sus garras / el rayo que deslumbra y aterra'. The descriptive effusion of 'Estival' (1887) that had presented 'la tigre de Bengala, / con su lustrosa piel manchada a trechos' (Darío, vol. 1, 518) has been chastened, although the pair of verbs 'deslumbra y aterra' introduce a note of sonority. The stanza maintains a wish to remain in 'el lodo humano', but this is expressed through figure rather than embodied in form, and the temptation of the sounding phrase - 'tempestades perversas', 'roedoras miserias' - is not consistently resisted. Nevertheless, a plainer idiom is at work which takes over in a bleak final stanza:

Pasa un murciélago.
Pasa una mosca. Un moscardón.
Una abeja en el crepúsculo.
No pasa nada.
La muerte llegó. (Darío, vol. 2, 675)

Six sentences - two of them verbless - in five lines. The more elaborate apostrophes to eagle, owl, dove, falcon, and nightingale of the earlier stanzas are punctured by the arrestingly matter-of-fact succession of bat, fly, and blowfly. The abstraction 'La muerte llegó' falls all the more effectively for fitting into the unelaborate syntax that precedes it. Death has undone eloquence.

The early *modernista* delight in eloquence was one aspect of their aestheticism. It was coupled, in spite of their hostility to bourgeois society, with a general enthusiasm for technological progress. Technology was yet another form of artifice, analogous to the poem. Saúl Yurkievich argues that this confidence was shaken by World War One:

El reino mecánico permite y hasta estimula el optimismo idealizador de los poetas modernistas. Pronto, el progreso tecnológico, ponderado por estos vates que ansían ponerse a tono de la época, aparece como amenazante ruptura de la *belle époque*, como generador de crisis o como destructor del plácido pasado, sobre todo a partir de la guerra del 14. (*Celebración*, 53)

History had invaded the *modernista* belief in the transcendence of the aesthetic realm. *The Waste Land* itself echoed certain images of First World War literature, but its impact in this period lies more in its status as an anti-poetry, its capacity actively to negate a belief in the aesthetic that now appeared bankrupt.

One should be cautious of making direct links between the Great War and the artistic avant-garde. Marinetti's *Manifeste du futurisme* appeared in *Le Figaro* in 1909, and Picasso and Braque began their experiments with collage in 1912, the same year that the Futurist exhibition was held in Paris. Spanish America's reliance on French cultural exports nevertheless left it exposed to the war in Europe when it did break out. War was also inescapable in a Mexico that was plunged in 1910 into 'the immensely complicated and horrendously violent struggle unleashed by Francisco Madero's call for clean elections'.¹⁷ The Mexican civil war ended in 1920 and was then officially designated the 'Mexican Revolution', although 'a self-perpetuating one-party state legitimized by a transcendent Revolution was to take a further decade of bloody struggle to create' (Williamson, 392). Mexicans had experienced the bare ferocity of historical events, and the old literary dispensation now seemed inadequate. Enrique González Martínez, who had himself attacked *modernista* rhetoric in his 'Tuércele el cuello al cisne de engañoso plumaje' (1905), appropriating Paul Verlaine's 'Prends l'éloquence et tords lui son cou',¹⁸ finds his own work challenged by historical events in the following anecdote of 1920 from Ricardo Arenales:

Cuanto más ruge la barbarie medioeval que nos está circundando, más se aguza y brilla la medioeval delicadeza de nuestros cantores. Una anécdota que se divulgó con rara presteza en los cenáculos de la capital, y que no es invención de mi fantasía, fija este contraste y lo lleva a niveles casi humorísticos. Bajo los fuegos de la decena trágica, y cuando México ardía en las fétidas llamas de la discordia - palacios en ruina, estatuas pata arriba, muertos podridos en las calles -, el autor glorioso de *La muerte del cisne* cantaba

¹⁷ Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin America* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 389-90.

¹⁸ González Martínez, *Preludios, Lirismos, Silenter, Los senderos ocultos* (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1946), p. 238; Verlaine, 'Art poétique' (1874), *Oeuvres poétiques complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 327

Sobre el dormido lago está el saúz que llora...

Una bala, que parecía tener enemistad personal con la Musa, penetra por la ventana, rompiendo los cristales y el poeta se ve obligado a retirarse a un paraje repuesto: ¡Por el dormido lago se oía el agudo silbido del máuser!¹⁹

It is a richly metaphorical anecdote: the interior space of self, or a privileged aesthetic, is invaded by historical events: 'la intersección entre el destino social y el individual'.

Yet there were later poets in the *modernista* tradition who followed the lead of Darío's 'Augurios' and developed an idiom that was clearly beyond the range of such criticism. Gwen Kirkpatrick describes this as *modernismo*'s 'dissonant legacy':

While Darío lamented the discordant elements that disturb the harmonic universe, other poets seize upon them and generate a new poetics, a process that parallels early twentieth-century music's fascination with dissonance and atonality. (p. 49)

Kirkpatrick is concerned chiefly with the Argentine Leopoldo Lugones, but she also includes the Mexican Ramón López Velarde in this stage of *modernismo*. Lugones was the first Latin American poet to accommodate the influence of Jules Laforgue. López Velarde, both indirectly through his reading of Lugones and directly through Enrique Díez-Canedo and Fernando Fortún's *La poesía francesa moderna: Antología* (1913), brought that influence to Mexico. In 'Literatura y literalidad' (1970) Paz dwells on this coincidence of Bostonian and Zacatecan Laforgues:

En 1905 el argentino Leopoldo Lugones, uno de los grandes poetas de nuestra lengua y uno de los menos estudiados, publica un volumen de poemas, *Los crepúsculos del jardín*, en el que aparecen por primera vez en español algunos rasgos laforguianos: ironía, choque entre el lenguaje coloquial y el literario, imágenes violentas que yuxtaponen el absurdo urbano al de una naturaleza convertida en grotesca matrona [...]. En 1909 Lugones publica *Lunario sentimental*: a despecho de ser una imitación de Laforgue, ese libro fue uno de los más originales de su tiempo y todavía puede leerse con asombro y delicia. La influencia del *Lunario sentimental* fue inmensa entre los poetas hispanoamericanos pero en ninguno fue más benéfica y estimulante que en el mexicano López Velarde. En 1919 López Velarde publica *Zozobra*, el libro central del "posmodernismo" hispanoamericano, es decir, de nuestro simbolismo antisimbolista. Dos años antes Eliot había publicado *Prufrock and other observations*. En Boston, recién salido de Harvard, un Laforgue protestante; en Zacatecas, escapado de un seminario, un Laforgue católico [...] El poeta mexicano murió poco después, en 1921, a los 33 años de edad. Su obra termina donde comienza la de Eliot... Boston y Zacatecas: la unión de estos dos nombres

¹⁹ Quoted in Sheridan, 96.

nos hace sonreír como si se tratase de una de esas asociaciones incongruentes en las que se complacía Laforgue. Dos poetas escriben, casi en los mismos años, en lenguas distintas y sin que ninguno de los dos sospeche siquiera la existencia del otro, dos versiones diferentes e igualmente *originales* de unos poemas que unos años antes había escrito un tercer poeta en otra lengua.²⁰

Laforgue introduced a ‘choque entre el lenguaje coloquial y literario’ to Mexican poetry: he challenged *modernista* eloquence and its attendant belief in harmony as an aesthetic resolution of material conflict. The suggestion of physical violence in the clash of colloquial and literary language implies the historicist dependence of the aesthetic on the social which occurs in Paz’s reading of *The Waste Land*: the poem does not describe history but is a part of it, and so behaves like it. As I have demonstrated, this ‘simbolismo antisimbolista’ is anticipated by Darío. Nevertheless, Laforgue enabled Lugones and then López Velarde not simply to chasten the *modernista* idiom, as the final stanza of ‘Augurios’ had chastened the stanzas that preceded it, but to experiment with a new harshness. Arthur Symons, in a passage that Eliot had marked in his own copy of *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, described this process in Laforgue as self-denying:

The old cadences, the old eloquence, the ingenuous seriousness of the poetry, are all banished, on a theory as self-denying as that which permitted Degas to dispense with recognisable beauty in his figures.²¹

Enrique González Martínez had tried to challenge the old eloquence, but his challenge had been limited.²² López Velarde’s ‘El retorno maléfico’ of *Zozobra* (1919) brings the influence of Laforgue into contact with the experience of the Mexican civil war and provides a sharp contrast with González Martínez’s ‘sobre el dormido lago está el saúz que llora...’ of Arenales’s earlier anecdote:

Mejor será no regresar al pueblo,
al edén subvertido que se calla
en la mutilación de la metralla.²³

²⁰ *El signo y el garabato* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1991), pp. 75-6.

²¹ 2nd edn (London: Archibald Constable, 1908), p. 104.

²² Paz declares in ‘Estela de José Juan Tablada’ (1945) that ‘González Martínez no rompe con el lenguaje modernista; atenúa sus excesos, vela sus luces, pero se sirve de sus mismas palabras para advertirnos de su falsedad’ (*Peras*, 60). The distinction can be hard to draw and Guillermo Sheridan (p. 65) mis-cites Jaime Torres Bodet’s admiration of González Martínez’s “puritanismo” frente a los alardes de los más célebres modernistas’ as praise for the later López Velarde (*Tiempo de arena* [México: FCE, 1955], p. 96).

²³ *Obras* (México: FCE, 1990), p. 206.

The bullets have not simply passed through the window of his study, but into the intimate space of memory - 'edén subvertido' - and ultimately into the poem's rhetoric itself. The political register of 'subvertido' invades the mythical 'edén', a rhetorical action that is recapitulated in the 'íntima tristeza reaccionaria' of the poem's final line (p. 207).

A literary language has been forced into the company of the anti-poetic or bathetic; its claims - to sublimate conflict for example - are called into question:

Y la fusilería grabó en la cal
de todas las paredes
de la aldea espectral,
negros y aciagos mapas,
porque en ellos leyerá el hijo pródigo
al volver a su umbral
en un anochecer de maleficio,
a la luz de petróleo de una mecha
su esperanza deshecha. (p. 206)

The delay here between the opening of the clause 'Porque en ellos leyerá el hijo pródigo...' and its conclusion in the final line generates expectation: the interposing qualifications predicate an object of enough complexity and importance to absolutely require their inclusion. Yet that object turns out to be a negation: 'su esperanza deshecha'. The sense of bathos is reinforced by the rhyme - 'mecha' / 'deshecha'. One expects the second half of a couplet to enforce some kind of relation, whether it be in accord or antithetical. Here, however, the line capitulates to an action of undoing. López Velarde uses the expectations of meaning that the formal qualities of the poem create - parenthetical intrusion and rhyming couplet - but then pulls the meaning from under them. The use of the couplet is Laforguian,²⁴ and its use for effects of bathos peppers Eliot's *Prufrock* - 'I grow old... I grow old... / I shall wear the bottom of my trousers rolled' (*CPP*, 16). Stephen Spender remarked of it: 'how completely the form will flop, if flopping suits Eliot's purpose'.²⁵ The Zacatecan Laforgue thus acts as a precursor for the pattern of voided aspiration that Paz will find in 'Los hombres huecos'.

²⁴ See, for example, the version of 'Je ne suis qu'un viveur lunaire' in Enrique Díez-Canedo and Fernando Fortun's *La poesía francesa moderna: Antología* (Madrid: Renacimiento, 1913), p. 121: 'Mis anchas mangas de mandarín pálido / recojo: fiero mi ademán provoca / y exhalo al fin, agrandando la boca, / dulces frases de crucifijo escuálido.'

²⁵ *The Destructive Element* (London: Cape, 1938), p. 136.

López Velarde also employs bathetic repetition in 'El retorno maléfico' that recalls the Eliot of 'Prufrock':

el lloro de recientes recientes
por la ubérrima ubre prohibida
de la vaca, rumiante y faraónica,
que al párvulo intimida;
campanario de timbre novedoso;
remozados altares;
el amor amoroso
de las parejas pares. (p. 207)

'El amor amoroso / de las parejas pares' has a family relation to the feeling of 'prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet' (*CPP*, 14). As the prodigal son returns to his town he feels isolated, an isolation confirmed by the sight of the 'parejas pares', just as Prufrock is severed from the drawing room society of the women; he may be titillated by their arms 'downed with light brown hair', but in conversation he cannot understand or be understood - "That is not what I meant at all. / That is not it, at all" (*CPP*, 16). The suggestion of an erotic relation that remains beyond the speaker is active in both poems. This alienation within the poem disrupts its eloquence and so infects the relationship, beyond its content, between writer and reader. Eloquence is a consideration for the outside world, a pleasing face for the drawing room, or home town, or the reader. When the author feels alienated from one of those worlds, articulacy suffers, and finds itself running into the clumsy repetitions of 'Prufrock' and 'El retorno maléfico'. A breakdown in social relations is registered by a breakdown in language - 'la intersección entre el destino individual y el social'.

However, this is not the only function of these repetitions in López Velarde's poems. The wordplay of 'la ubérrima ubre prohibida' foregrounds the materiality of the words themselves. Torres Bodet noted the effect in an essay of 1930 on López Velarde which described certain moments of conversation when 'las palabras ya no tienen otro valor que el plástico y gratuito de su volumen, de su sonoridad, de su peso'.²⁶ Although he relates it to colloquial speech, the effect militates against the realist and historicist reading that I have applied to López Velarde's 'simbolismo antisimbolista'. While 'edén subvertido' and 'la mutilación de la metralla' bring a historical reality into the poet's meditations, 'la ubérrima ubre prohibida' asserts language as a presence independent of

²⁶ 'Cercanía de López Velarde', *Contemporáneos*, 28-29 (septiembre-octubre 1930), p. 112.

its referential function. It prolongs rather than negates the earlier *modernista* discovery of the ‘palabra plástica’. As Saúl Yurkievich describes it:

Los modernistas descubren que el lenguaje no es neutro mediador, conductor obediente y mimético de la expresión subjetiva, descubren que tiene su propia materialidad, su coloración autónoma, su expresividad específica y que es imposible plegarlo por completo a los designios del poeta. (*Celebración*, 55)

This is a tendency which the *vanguardia* of Huidobro and Vallejo will explore with works that claim an autonomy for the verbal sphere. While Paz’s leftist reading of *The Waste Land* places it within an anti-poetic, realist tradition, he is also aware, often reluctantly, of the Contemporáneos’ preoccupation with the plastic value of the poet’s medium.²⁷ As Pedro Serrano asserts, it was through the Contemporáneos that the Laforguian López Velarde could act as a precursor of Eliot:

López Velarde’s own poetry, his influence on those younger poets [the Contemporáneos generation], and their effort to make him known, laid the basis for a very quick, and at the same time smooth, introduction of Eliot into Mexico. When the *Contemporáneos* began to translate Eliot, it was because some of his poetic discoveries were already there, thanks to a poet who followed a parallel and very close poetic path.²⁸

López Velarde was a more ambivalent precursor than Serrano’s ‘smooth introduction of Eliot’ would imply, but he is no less productive for that. He embodies conflicts that are present in Eliot’s own work.

Eliot described Laforgue – a poet without whom he doubted he ‘should have been able to write poetry at all’ –²⁹ in terms that entertain the historicist bias of Paz’s own interest in Eliot. The French poet

showed how, much [*sic*] more use poetry could make of contemporary ideas and feelings, of the emotional quality of contemporary ideas, than one had supposed. (‘MTP’, 13)

Eliot also described the work of Laforgue and his contemporaries as the search for ‘a sincere idiom’ (p. 13), which moralizes the artistic development. Eliot coincides with a strong ethical bias in Paz’s own prose of the 1930s. Yet Eliot also experimented with the

²⁷ Throughout my study I will use ‘*Contemporáneos*’ in italics to refer to the literary periodical and ‘the Contemporáneos’ to refer to the group of writers that contributed to it.

²⁸ *The Rhetorical Construction of the Modern Poet in T. S. Eliot and Octavio Paz in Poetry and Criticism* (MPhil, King’s College London, 1995), p. 170.

²⁹ *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1996), p. 287.

‘palabra plástica’ of López Velarde and the *modernistas*, most conspicuously in the ‘drip drop drip drop drop drop drop’ sequence of ‘What the Thunder Said’ (CPP, 73), which plays the phonetic presence of the word against the absence of its desired referent. Paz’s own description of *The Waste Land* as ‘un obelisco cubierto de signos, invulnerables ante los vaivenes del tiempo’ (‘TSE’, 40) perhaps unconsciously accepts the tendency of a fragmentary poem to separate material sign from definitive meaning.

When Paz describes the Laforgue connection between Eliot and López Velarde he is writing retrospectively in essays of 1950, 1963 and 1970.³⁰ When he read ‘El páramo’ in 1930, he may not have made the connection. Manguía does signal the influence of Laforgue on the early Eliot in his introduction to ‘El páramo’, and illustrates it with quotations, in English, from ‘Prufrock’ and ‘Portrait of a Lady’ (p. 10); yet it is not until 1938 that Rodolfo Usigli’s translation of ‘Prufrock’ appears in Spanish. When, in later essays, Paz describes the nexus that runs between Laforgue, Eliot and López Velarde, one can argue just as convincingly that he is reading the Mexican poet back through his later knowledge of Eliot, rather than, as I have aimed to establish, reading López Velarde as precursor of Eliot. It is impossible to settle this argument with any finality. Nevertheless, one can assume that Paz read López Velarde before Eliot, and that he was aware of the Contemporáneos attempts to rescue the Mexican poet for the avant-garde after the nationalists had taken possession of ‘La suave patria’.³¹ López Velarde provided the model for a poetry that disrupted eloquence, and which therefore brought questions about the efficacy of that eloquence into the poem itself. Even if Paz did not know López Velarde’s statement, which he quotes in *Cuadrivio* (p. 54), that ‘el sistema poético se ha convertido en sistema crítico’, the poems themselves clearly play off a critical consciousness against lyric effusion, and so open a route to *The Waste Land*. In a sense, López Velarde provides the ‘Prufrock’ that Paz wouldn’t have known - ‘Su obra termina donde la de Eliot comienza’ - and the recurrence of Eliot in Paz’s writings on López Velarde testifies to the existence of a persistent association.

López Velarde provided a link between *modernismo* and a later tradition that brought a dissonant reality to trouble the harmonies of the early Darío and his peers. This development can be described as a realist turn. Yet there is also a tendency in López Velarde’s work which is anti-realist, foregrounding the materiality of words on

³⁰ See ‘El lenguaje de López Velarde’ (Perras, 72), ‘El camino de la pasión’ (*Cuadrivio*, 56), and ‘Literatura y literalidad’ (SyG, 75-6).

³¹ For an example of Contemporáneos hostility to ‘La suave patria’, see Torres Bodet’s ‘Cercanía de López Velarde’, pp. 131-33.

the page and in the ear. There are therefore two contradictory traditions which run from López Velarde, and Paz's use of Eliot will explore both of them over time. In the years leading up to Eliot's appearance, however, it is the realist tendency, exemplified in the work of Salvador Novo, that is most conspicuous. Novo was involved in the translation of North American poetry into Spanish, and adopted the colloquial idiom in his own verse that he found there. José Emilio Pacheco describes this as the 'otra vanguardia', 'realista y no surrealista', which led in the 1960's to the movement of *antipoesía*.³²

Nineteenth-century Spanish American culture had been predominantly francophile: the *modernistas* were nurtured by Hugo, Baudelaire, the symbolists and Parnassians, while liberal politicians had taken France as the model of the modern state. Contacts with Europe were severed, however, during the First World War, and Torres Bodet recalls that 'la Francia en la que confiábamos no era tanto el país que peleó heroicamente ante el invasor de 1914, cuanto la República de Danton, de Pasteur y de Victor Hugo'.³³ As Pacheco points out, Mexicans were forced to turn to the United States, and to acknowledge that the traditional enemy now had culture as well as power ('Nota', 332). The chief catalyst for this shift was the scholar Pedro Henríquez Ureña who had learnt English in childhood and held a post at Columbia University, but who taught at the Escuela de Altos Estudios in Mexico City in the 1920s. In 1921 he admitted the young Salvador Novo, who was later to become one of the Contemporáneos group, to his tutelage. Another member of Henríquez Ureña's circle was the Nicaraguan Salomón de la Selva. Novo never made any direct admission of de la Selva's influence on him, but both Pacheco and Guillermo Sheridan are convinced of the connection. For Pacheco:

Lo que Novo, adolescente de dieciocho años, aprende en De la Selva es la posibilidad de expropiar, para los fines de su propia lengua y dentro de su molde, la dicción poética angloamericana. ('Nota', 328)

Experience of the civil war created a watershed between the rhetorical worlds of González Martínez and López Velarde. De la Selva was the only Spanish American poet

³² 'Nota sobre la otra vanguardia', *Revista Iberoamericana*, 106-107 (enero-junio 1979), p. 327. Fernando Alegría, in his *Literatura y revolución* (México: FCE, 1971), p. 203, attempts to separate poets such as López Velarde and Salvador Novo, from a true *antipoesía*, which for him begins with Pablo de Rokha and César Vallejo. While there are clearly distinctions that can be made between these poets, his attempt to seal off *antipoesía* from trends in Spanish American poetry that are evident as early as Darío's *Cantos de vida y esperanza* (1905) is unconvincing. I find Pacheco's more open use of the term, and his identification of a 'realist' tradition a more productive basis for exploration.

³³ *Tiempo de arena* (México: FCE, 1955), p. 102.

to fight in the First World War, an experience which informed his volume of poems *El soldado desconocido* of 1922. Sheridan elaborates on the example that confronted Novo:

Novo se sorprendió entonces ante los logros de De la Selva, que llevaba años cerca de Henríquez Ureña, y especialmente de *El soldado desconocido* (México, 1922) con sus despliegues vanguardistas: un realismo fragmentario, violento, recursos continuos de un prosaísmo brutal, integración de sub-lenguajes procaces, destrucción de la estética “bonita” y equilibrada previa, relativización de puntos de vista poéticos y/o narrativas, depauperización del *status* noble y sagrado del poeta, etcétera. (pp. 116-17)

López Velarde introduced a dissonant aesthetic; de la Selva accentuates this tendency and a ‘realismo fragmentario’ is the result. Sheridan’s terms could just as easily be applied to ‘El páramo’. Pacheco in fact alludes to Ángel Flores’s title for *The Waste Land* - *Tierra baldía* - in his own description of de la Selva’s poems:

El panorama que observa *El soldado desconocido* es el arquetípico del siglo xx: ‘Esta villa en escombros, / estas casas quemadas, / estas ruinas de muros:’ [...] Y en la tierra baldía se levanta ‘el *dug-out* hermético, / sonoro de risas y de pedos’, donde un soldado pronuncia su ‘Oda a Safo’: ‘-A mi mujer le apestan los sobacos’. (‘Nota’, 331)

The ‘escombros’ and ‘ruinas’ of de la Selva’s war echo the ‘stony rubbish’ (CPP, 61) of Eliot’s poem. The juxtaposition of Sappho and stinking armpits also has its parallel in the ironic perspectives that are opened up in *The Waste Land*. De la Selva provides a link from the ironic vision that Paz identifies with Laforgue, to the practices of Eliot’s middle poems.

Eliot, in later writings, was uncomfortable with readings of *The Waste Land* that placed it too crudely in the context of a postwar generation:

When I wrote a poem called *The Waste Land* some of the more approving critics said that I had expressed the “disillusionment of a generation”, which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention. (SE, 368)

Paul Fussell has nevertheless demonstrated that the literature of World War One, ‘its settings of blasted landscape and ruins, suggestive of what Guy Chapman recalls as “the confluent acne of the waste land under the walls of Ypres”’, enters the rhetoric of Eliot’s

poem, if not its conscious intention.³⁴ Eliot does not object, however, to readings that place him in the context of postwar London so much as the role of spokesperson that some of those readings imply. He refuses to accept the public role. Is *The Waste Land* a public or a private poem; does it portray an inner or an outer world? I have argued that the distinction between inner and outer is confused in 'The Burial of the Dead' where the motions of spring are also mental motions. The tendency of nineteenth-century poetry, which McLuhan identifies, to blur the distinction between inner and outer reality undermines claims that the poem is either representative or personal: it is both. In fact, the rhetoric of war in the poem replays this blurring of inner and outer: a distant event - the war - is brought home to London.

The harsh realism of de la Selva's *El soldado desconocido* coincided with North American experiment with colloquial verse. In 1923 a short 'Antología norte-americana moderna' appeared in *La Falange*. The collection included what Paz describes as a 'pulcra traducción' (SyG, 103) by Salvador Novo of Ezra Pound's 'N.Y.'. Pound's poem follows an apostrophe to the city, 'Listen to me, and I will breathe into thee a soul', with a stanza in italics that undermines this voice: '*This is no maid. / Neither could I play upon a reed if I had one.*'³⁵ The rival claims of poetic and prosaic realities are played off within the poem, even if the italicized stanza still employs poetic syntax - '*Now do I know that I am mad / For here are a million people surly with traffic.*' '*Surly with traffic*' is a poetic construction applied to a banal reality. Novo in fact accentuates the colloquialism of the passage, choosing more idiomatic alternatives in Spanish to constructions such as 'Now do I know that':

*Ahora sé que estoy loco
porque aquí hay un millón
de gente aturdida del tráfico.*³⁶

Novo translated and introduced an expanded anthology, *La poesía norteamericana moderna*, the following year. It included no mention of Eliot, but Ezra Pound and other Imagists such as John Gould Fletcher and Amy Lowell were represented. Novo's introduction in fact presents a list of rules that are practically lifted from the 'Imagist

³⁴ *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 326.

³⁵ *Collected Shorter Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 62.

³⁶ 'Antología norte-americana moderna', *La Falange*, 7 (1 octubre 1923), p. 384.

Manifiesto' of 1915.³⁷ Novo's experience of the anthology then fed into his *XX poemas* of the following year:

Es indudable que Novo incorpora rasgos de la nueva poesía angloamericana en sus *XX poemas* de 1925: ampliación de la esfera de lo poético, uso del lenguaje común y coloquial, preferencia por el verso libre. Otras características incorporadas son más bien de filiación imaginista: eliminación de lo no esencial, reducción del poema a la imagen o a una secuencia de imágenes, presentación fragmentaria y discontinua. (*Inventores*, 155)

Five years before 'El páramo' appeared in the pages of *Contemporáneos*, Salvador Novo, inspired by the Imagists, provided a Mexican example of colloquial diction and fragmentary form. The virtue of Novo's 'pulcra traducción' of Pound was a virtue that Paz found in Eliot, and he criticized León Felipe when he 'cedió a la hispánica manía de amplificar' at the end of his translation of *The Hollow Men*, which 'agrega una línea y dos adjetivos: *De este modo se acaba el mundo / No de un golpe seco sino / en un largo plañido*' ('REM', 42). Novo prepared a context for the reception of Eliot's own use of colloquial language. The register of Manguía's translation of the Albert and Lil and I dialogue that concludes 'A Game of Chess' is one of the few successes of 'El páramo': 'Lo que pasa es que eres una buena tonta, dije. Si no te deja Alberto por la paz, pa qué diablos te casaste si no querías hijos' (p. 22). Manguía also drew attention to Eliot's use of the colloquial in his introduction:

Se ha adueñado Eliot con despejo y naturalidad de esa especie de idioma nuevo - si puede ser nuevo aún "Les Amours Jaunes" que publica Corbière [*sic*] en 1873 -, en el que se anteponen las expresiones más vulgares del diálogo callejero a las metáforas refinadas de un cerebro en bonanza, y la alta complejidad de un patetismo elocuente y original a un desenfado en ratos agrio, irónico o mordaz. (p. 9)

In fact, Manguía's description here is closer to Pound's 'N.Y.', which Novo had translated than to the Albert and Lil and I dialogue itself. Where Eliot allows his characters to speak without framing them, Pound alternates 'metáforas refinadas' with a more prosaic register. When Paz himself experiments with colloquial verse in the 1940s, he tends to favour this ironic contrast of poetic with spoken diction rather than the unqualified speech of 'A Game of Chess'. Novo and Manguía not only provide a

³⁷ Novo's anthology is practically 'inconsegurable e inconsultable' (Sheridan, 172), but Anthony Stanton quotes his rules in *Inventores de tradición* (México: El Colegio de México/FCE), p. 154.

context in which Eliot can be understood, but they channel that understanding in a particular direction.

Paz declared that 'El páramo' contradicted everything that he thought was poetic. However, Eliot's challenge to the horizons of expectations created by his various precursors is less extreme than one might expect. Eliot's use of colloquial language and the realist contemplation of a frequently sordid reality would have been familiar to readers of Salvador Novo and Salomón de la Selva. They had already answered 'la orden enfática de tirar a la basura los símbolos prestigiosos de la lírica, especialmente los de la tradición más inmediata: la romántica y simbolista o modernista' (*Inventores*, 160). Yet the 'conciencia del lenguaje' that the *modernistas* found in French symbolism creates a climate which accommodates the formal sophistication of an Eliot who was himself a keen reader of nineteenth-century French poetry. The reaction against the tendency towards verbal preciousness of *modernismo* was initiated before Novo and de la Selva by Rubén Darío and then Ramón López Velarde. López Velarde is the most comprehensive and contradictory of Eliot's Spanish American precursors. Through his reading of Lugones and Laforgue, he anticipates the ironic, colloquial reaction of Novo against *modernismo*, yet he also preserves the movement's awareness of language and the 'palabra plástica', which is a vital component of the Contemporáneos reading of Eliot, as I shall demonstrate in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Contemporaries

Salvador Novo's *XX poemas* were published in 1925, three years before the first issue of the magazine *Contemporáneos* appeared. Although they lacked a collective means of expression at this stage, Novo and his peers were nevertheless beginning to acquire an identity: Xavier Villaurrutia had already referred, in a lecture of 1924, to a 'grupo sin grupo'.¹ As this comment implies, relations between different members of the group were loose, and would remain so even during the years of the magazine's publication (1928-1931); yet individual differences did not prevent the *Contemporáneos* from exerting a coherent influence on Mexican literary life. José Gorostiza, looking back in an article of 1937, identifies this paradox of a virtual existence manifesting itself in real effects: 'El grupo ha tenido solamente – insisto – una existencia "virtual", no exenta, sin embargo, como toda creación mítica, de producir efectos importantes en el mundo de los hechos.'² One of those real effects was Paz's acquaintance with an Eliot who was both shaped by and served to define certain aspects of the group. In the previous chapter, I placed T. S. Eliot within the context of Spanish American *modernismo*, partly as a recognition that, even in reaction, later writers were indebted to the work of Darío and his contemporaries, but also to establish the common roots in nineteenth-century French poetry that Paz, via the *modernistas*, shares with Eliot. Having established Eliot's precursors in Mexico, I will now focus on the writers that provided a contemporary context in 1930 for Eliot's reception.

A month before the first issue of *Contemporáneos* appeared, the group published an *Antología de la poesía mexicana moderna*. Jaime Torres Bodet, one of the group's most prolific members, describes it as 'una selección-manifiesto y una antología-declaración, como las que circulaban en Francia en aquellos años'.³ It aimed to rescue recent Mexican poetry from the twin dangers of politics and nationalism. The note it includes on Manuel Maples Arce tartly observes that 'el marco de socialismo político en que ha sabido articularse le ha sido [...] de la mayor utilidad', while the selection from

¹ 'La poesía de los jóvenes de México', in *Obras* (México: FCE, 1966), p. 828.

² 'La poesía actual de México' (1937), in *Prosa* (México: Lecturas mexicanas, 1995), p. 169.

³ *Memorias*, 2nd edn (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1981), pp. 159-60.

López Velarde, in a reading that would be followed later by Paz, provocatively declares that 'su verdadera conquista no era la ambicionada *alma nacional*, sino la suya propia'.⁴ The 'esteticismo militante' of the group, as Salvador Novo would later describe it,⁵ their rejection of an art contaminated by overtly political or nationalistic content, brought them naturally to favour a rhetoric of artistic purity. In an essay on the group's interest in artistic purism, Anthony Stanton observes that an early enthusiasm among certain members for the Juan Ramón Jiménez of *Eternidades* (1918) and *Piedra y cielo* (1919) gives way subsequently to an interest in Paul Valéry. Stanton's discussion is vitiated, however, by a determination to extract definable theoretical formulations about Pure Poetry from the outset:

Bremond utiliza el concepto para justificar una idea romántica e irracionalista del poeta como un inspirado; Valéry, para expresar una idea racional, clásica, científica y cartesiana del proceso de construcción creadora. (*Inventores*, 130)

For the Contemporáneos the term was a more provisional, and malleable, means of conceptualizing a diffuse set of artistic preoccupations; and Valéry himself defined Pure Poetry negatively as 'un type inaccessible'.⁶ Stanton places an unnecessary limit on the observations of *Inventores de tradición* by employing general terms, such as *Poesía pura*, *modernismo*, and *romanticismo*, as if they had a stable identity, rather than treating each as a loose marker for a whole range of different, and constantly evolving, concerns. The 'poesía desnuda' and the 'poesía pura' of Jiménez and Valéry respectively provide an important continuation of, and response to, *modernismo*, which is then active in the Contemporáneos reception of Eliot. It is during the nineteenth century and in the works of the *modernistas* that this rhetoric of purity appears, before it had occurred to anyone to build a theory upon it; and it is within this broader tradition of artistic consciousness that the usage of Jiménez, Valéry and the Contemporáneos lies.⁷

⁴ Jorge Cuesta, ed., *Antología de la poesía mexicana moderna* (1st edn, 1928; repr., México: FCE, 1985), pp. 157 & 123. For the hostile journalistic response to this 'antología-declaración' see Sheridan, 314-15. For the background of Mexican debate in the 1920s about a nationalistic 'literatura mexicana viril' see Luis Mario Schneider, *Ruptura y continuidad* (México: FCE, 1975), pp. 159-89.

⁵ Letter to Merlin H. Forster, published in his *Los Contemporáneos 1920-1932, perfil de un experimento vanguardista mexicano* (México: Ediciones Andrea, 1964), p. 117.

⁶ 'Poésie pure: notes pour une conférence' (1928), in *Oeuvres*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 1463.

⁷ A rhetoric, rather than a theory, of purism is already evident in Edgar Allan Poe, one of the most important precursors of *modernismo*: 'That pleasure which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and the most intense, is derived, I maintain, from the contemplation of the beautiful', 'The Poetic Principle' (1850), in *Poems and Essays on Poetry* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), p. 93.

‘El caso Strawinsky’, an article by Samuel Ramos, provides one of the most sustained expressions of this tradition to appear in *Contemporáneos*. Ramos betrays a lineage derived from the symbolists and their preoccupation with music as the model for all the arts; his terms effortlessly shift from music to ‘art’ in general: ‘la obra strawinskiana [...] se aproxima como ninguna otra, en nuestro tiempo, al ideal de la pureza artística’.⁸ The problem of the analogy between music as a ‘pure’ form of art and poetry is, of course, language – the impurity of a medium which serves both artist and non-artist alike. It is this problem, or the awareness of this problem, rather than any theory of purity *per se*, that informs the *Contemporáneos* reading of Jiménez and Valéry. Although the terms ‘puro’, ‘pureza’, and the related ‘desnuda’, pepper the prose of the *Contemporáneos*, they do not amount to a consistent theory,⁹ and it is not through them, or any theory which a literary historian might retrospectively attach to them, that the significance of Juan Juan Ramón Jiménez and Paul Valéry for the group, and hence the debate that Eliot would enter, can be assessed. For that, one must look directly at the works of Juan Ramón Jiménez and Paul Valéry that the *Contemporáneos* read and translated.

Although, as Stephen Hart observes, the prose writings of Juan Ramón Jiménez carry several echoes from the works of Mallarmé and Valéry,¹⁰ it was through two books of poems that he exerted an influence on the *Contemporáneos*: *Eternidades* (1918) and *Piedra y cielo* (1919). The first of these became widely available in Mexico in 1923 as the final section of Pedro Henríquez Ureña’s collection of Jiménez’s work, *Poesía de Juan Ramón Jiménez*. Its appearance, according to Guillermo Sheridan, ‘tuvo la calidad de los grandes acontecimientos’ (p. 158).

⁸ *Contemporáneos*, 15 (agosto 1929), p. 5.

⁹ A random selection of comments that employ these terms demonstrates the lack of theoretical consistency to which they were generally subject by the group: ‘...el agua pura y corriente del poema’, Gilberto Owen, “‘Biombo’”, poemas de Jaime Torres Bodet’ (1925), in *Obras* (México: FCE, 1996), p. 217; ‘...un lirismo de creación pura, orgulloso y único’, Xavier Villaurrutia, ‘La poesía moderna en lengua española’ (1941), in *Obras*, p. 871; ‘...la pureza abstracta de su lenguaje’, anonymous note on Enrique González Martínez (*Antología*, 99); ‘La hermosura independiente, en sus poemas, da una noción más franca de depuración que de pureza’, anonymous note on Salvador Díaz Mirón (*Antología*, 54); ‘...una renuncia deliberada a los modos esquemáticos de pensar que la poesía de Zozobra había llevado hasta la desnudez despojada y despejada de Álgebra’, Jaime Torres Bodet, ‘Cercanía de López Velarde’, 131-2; ‘En una edición elegante y correcta, ilustrada por el autor, la obra limpia aparece sola, en valiosa concisión, sin soportes, desnuda [...] El interior – la novela – contiene en sí un afán geométrico, una intención matemática, que lo depura’, Enrique González Rojo, ‘Dama de corazones’, *Contemporáneos*, 3 (agosto 1928), p. 320.

¹⁰ See “‘Poésie Pure” in Three Spanish Poets: Jiménez, Guillén and Salinas’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 20 (1984), p. 170. Hart also speculates that ‘a close reading of Jiménez’s prose writings and poetry would seem to suggest [...] that the Spanish poet was far better informed about Valéry’s writings than he cared to admit’ (p. 168).

Although Jiménez did not provide the Mexicans with a systematic theory, his poems were nevertheless appropriated for programmatic ends. In 1925 Ortega y Gasset published *La deshumanización del arte*, which attacked the aestheticism of recent developments in the arts. Guillermo Sheridan describes the reaction of the Contemporáneos: ‘no pudieron tolerar la proposición de que el refinamiento estético implicara un apartamiento de lo humano’ (p. 247). They organized a dinner where they publicly condemned Ortega y Gasset’s theory, concluding with a reading of the poem ‘Vino, primero, pura’ by Juan Ramón Jiménez. Jiménez describes a poetry that is progressively encumbered with ‘no sé qué ropajes’ to a point where, ‘fastuosa de tesoros’, it loses its appeal before returning to a state of innocence:

¡Oh pasión de mi vida, poesía
desnuda, mía para siempre!¹¹

Yet what did it mean? Jaime Torres Bodet, who was himself present at the meeting would later wonder in his memoir, *Tiempo de arena*:

Muy bien. Pero la incógnita subsistía. ¿Cuál era esa túnica, de que la lírica había de despojarse? ¿La vida diaria? ¿La anécdota – sensual o sentimental? ¿El fervor humano?... ¿O, solamente, el adorno falso, la retórica imitada, el insolente lujo verbal, “la iracundia de hiel y sin sentido”?

Imagino que, en esos tiempos, ni Xavier [Villaurrutia] ni Gilberto Owen hubieran aceptado establecer una diferencia cortante entre las dos series de estas preguntas. (p. 227)¹²

Torres Bodet suggests that debate about the content of poems was intimately linked to a reaction against the rhetoric of *modernismo*, ‘el insolente lujo verbal’, which clutters experience, a reading that would have been apparent to Jiménez himself whose own career traced a departure from an early infatuation with *modernista* work. Yet as I have demonstrated, this effort of rhetorical cleaning house had been initiated by Rubén Darío, and lines which appear in the poem such as ‘Y yo le sonreía’ (p. 88) and ‘Creí de nuevo en ella’ (p. 89) in their directness of statement recall the final stanza of Darío’s ‘Augurios’. The Contemporáneos at this stage were less likely to see Juan Ramón Jiménez as a continuation of Darío’s work, however, than as a departure from the imitators of Darío who viewed the poem as ‘una simple embriaguez verbal’.¹³ Jiménez

¹¹ *Poesía de Juan Ramón Jiménez*, ed. by Pedro Henríquez Ureña (México: Cultura, 1923), pp. 88-9.

¹² *Tiempo de arena* (México: FCE, 1955), p. 227.

¹³ Gorostiza, *Prosa*, 169.

thus falls into the line that I have traced through López Velarde to Eliot. Guillermo Sheridan points out that Gilberto Owen and Xavier Villaurrutia were reading López Velarde alongside Juan Ramón Jiménez assiduously in 1924 (p. 158). The image of ‘poesía desnuda’, which litters the rhetoric of the Contemporáneos, itself echoes one of López Velarde’s most memorable statements about poetry:

Ciertamente, la Poesía es un ropaje; pero ante todo, es una sustancia. Ora celestes éteres becquerianos, ora tabacos de pecado. [...] Para los actos trascendentales – sueño, baño, o amor -, nos desnudamos.¹⁴

For Jiménez that pared down rhetoric allowed an uncluttered relationship between poet and poetry – expressed in the possession of the final line, ‘mía para siempre’. As I argued in ‘Precursors’, however, there is also a tendency in López Velarde towards a plasticity rather than a transparency of expression. Samuel Ramos, in the discussion of Stravinsky referred to earlier, explained this tendency of an art that was purified of external reference to display a greater ‘aptitud plástica’:

Si la música tiene en su origen una función de lenguaje y cada una de sus partes significa algo, al perfeccionarse, ese significado se va perdiendo hasta que al fin no expresa nada que no sea la música misma. De manera que lo que en un principio era un simple *medio* para expresar otra cosa diferente, se convierte en un fin en sí [...] Si la música pura ha perdido todo significado concreto en cambio ha ganado una aptitud plástica que le asegura una perduración y una universalidad casi ilimitada. (pp. 13-14)

While Torres Bodet claims that neither Villaurrutia nor Owen would have distinguished between a purism that cleaned up florid *modernista* rhetoric and one that expunged external reference from the poem, Ramos implies that to do the latter in fact leads to a more opaque, hence *modernista* language, in spite of the simplified syntax and more everyday vocabulary. In fact, although Jiménez’s poem eschews the sonority of the earlier stanzas of Darío’s ‘Augurios’, its language does condense into a tight pattern of assonance in a line such as ‘no sé qué ropajes’ – aural presence begins to assert itself independently of meaning. The opening image, ‘vestida de inocencia’, itself expresses the paradox of a form of purity which is yet a material presence; and the final appearance of a ‘poesía desnuda’ still leaves open the question of what something would

¹⁴ ‘José Juan Tablada’ (1920), in *Obras* (México: FCE, 1990), p. 550.

be that is more naked than innocence. Jiménez's language has a tendency to assert itself as a material presence beyond its claims of purity.

This paradox of a language that simultaneously asserts and negates itself is evident in another of the key poems of *Eternidades*:

¡Inteligencia, dame
El nombre exacto de las cosas!
...Que mi palabra sea
la cosa misma,
creada por mi alma nuevamente.
Que por mí vayan todos
los que no las conocen, a las cosas;
que por mí vayan todos
los que ya las olvidan, a las cosas;
que por mí vayan todos
los mismos que las aman, a las cosas...
¡Inteligencia, dame
el nombre exacto, y tuyo,
y suyo, y mío, de las cosas! (Jiménez, 87-88)

A romantic theme underlies this poem - the search for a relationship with nature enabled by the affective attunement of the poet to the world, 'la cosa misma, / creada por mi alma nuevamente'. What complicates this picture, however, is a post-modernista awareness that forces Jiménez to frame this theme of affective relations within that of language - 'Que mi palabra sea la cosa misma, / creada por mi alma nuevamente.' The experience of language comes between the poet and his experience of the world; right relation with the thing depends upon finding the right word, 'el nombre exacto'. The two elements of the classic romantic model, self and object, have become three elements: self-language-object, or *alma-palabra-cosa*. Yet the question must arise, how is the precise word to be found, how is it to be known, if it does not issue from a relation with the world, but enacts that relation? How can this three-way model work if no single element is given priority to organize the other two? Jiménez's response is to turn that three-way relation back to a binary one by conflating word and thing - 'Que mi palabra sea la cosa misma.' Yet this conflation of *palabra* and *cosa* is itself ambiguous. Has the word conceded to the thing or has it effaced it? Has language come to replace reality, asserted its own plastic presence?

Although Jiménez's rhetoric avoids the sonorities of the *modernistas*, his language does nevertheless depend upon a tenuous relation to the world it would describe. His repeated use of the word 'cosas' as the end towards which the poem

moves is itself remarkably abstract. The poem carries the reader to a linguistic, not a physical reality – a pine or a stream, for example. The poem's language also tends to assert its own plasticity in local affects of assonance – ‘los que no las conocen, a las cosas’, ‘los mismos que las aman, a las cosas’. In fact, the syntactic repetition ‘a las cosas’ gives the poem an incantatory character. Gilberto Owen, one of the most assiduous readers of Jiménez among the Contemporáneos, praised, in his essay ‘Poesía - ¿pura? – plena’ (1927), what he described, no doubt with the Spanish poet in mind, as ‘esa sensualidad abstracta que sigue siendo la mejor pieza cobrada por los puristas’.¹⁵ That sensuality, however, is as much an experience of language, as it is of the world.

While the call of ‘¡Intelijencia, dame...!’ for ‘el nombre exacto’ represents an implicit criticism of *modernista* verbosity, it nevertheless operates within a verbal world familiar to the tradition it rejects. Jiménez's poem can even be accused of taking a step back from the *modernistas* as its call for a relationship between word and thing would have seemed optimistic to Darío. Although never entirely consistent, Darío tended towards a view that either placed the world outside the frame – ‘bosque ideal que lo real complica’ – or the word – ‘Y no hallo sino la palabra que huye.’¹⁶ In this context, the reputed escapism and Idealism of the *modernistas* can be read as a pragmatic acceptance of the disjunction between the world and the poet's medium, language.

The programmatic aspect of Jiménez's poem must be qualified by the observation that it conducts itself in the subjunctive, not the indicative – it is a prayer for relation between self, word and world, not an assertion that this state exists. The very act of desiring connection is an implicit admission of its absence. When Stephen Hart claims that Jiménez ‘had a faith in the harmonious relation of self and world, language and reality’ he overstates the case (p. 183). Jiménez himself is too aware as a poet to share fully that Platonic belief in a single essence shared between word and world that underpins Ureña's description of his poems: ‘Con lento y eficaz sortilegio, su mar sonoro y su niebla fosforente nos apartarán del mundo de las diarias apariencias, y sólo quedará, para nuestro espíritu absorto, la esencia pura de la luz y la música del mundo’ (p. 5).

Ureña's introduction praised the ‘exaltación lírica’ (p. 14) of Jiménez, a significant choice of phrase that I will cite later applied to St.-John Perse, and which

¹⁵ *Obras* (México: FCE, 1996), p. 225. Owen's essay concludes with his own poem, ‘Pureza’, which refers to ‘la palabra / hecha carne de alma, luz tangible’ (p. 229).

¹⁶ ‘Yo soy aquel que ayer no más decía...’ (1905), *Poesías completas*, vol. 2, 629 and ‘Yo persigo una forma...’ (1896), vol. 1, 622.

applies also both as mood and conscious theme, to Paz's own work. The poems of *Eternidades* are certainly very attractive, and Paz would later praise them while remaining sceptical about their purity: 'si no fue una pureza poética, como se creía en aquella época, sí fue una depuración retórica' (*Vill*, 54). Jiménez attempts, post-*modernismo*, to return to an innocent relationship with the world, but he is unable to negate that consciousness of language as a separate realm between the self and the world that *modernismo* bequeathed. His prayer for a word that is the thing slides inevitably into a language that effaces the world, rather than one that leads to it. *Exaltación lírica* is thus qualified by *conciencia*, and most specifically by *conciencia del lenguaje*, as Guillermo Sucre describes it. Although his poems operate in a kind of abstract pastoral that is distant from the urban landscapes of Eliot's *Waste Land*, he falls into that line I have already traced through López Velarde, in which the impulse to praise is checked by an awareness of conditions that may impede the flow of feeling from self to world. He accepts that awareness reluctantly, however, and the *Contemporáneos* would turn from him to Paul Valéry, a poet who willingly accepted and explored a consciousness of the 'relations diverses et multiformes du langage avec les effets qu'il produit sur les hommes'.¹⁷

'El páramo' was immediately preceded in the July 1930 issue of *Contemporáneos* by a translation of two passages from Paul Valéry which represented a shift from Jiménez's vision:

Sabemos que la palabra *poesía* tiene dos sentidos, es decir, dos funciones distintas. Designa, primero, cierto género de emociones; un estado emotivo particular que puede ser provocado por los objetos o las circunstancias más diversos. Decimos de un paisaje que es poético, lo decimos de una circunstancia de la vida y, en veces, también de una persona. Pero, además, en su Segunda acepción y en un sentido más estrecho de la palabra *poesía* nos lleva a pensar en un *arte*: en esa extraña industria que tiene por objeto reedificar la emoción señalada por el primer sentido de la palabra.

Restituir la emoción poética a voluntad, fuera de las condiciones naturales en que espontáneamente se produjo y por medio de los artificios del lenguaje, es tanto el designio del poeta como la idea inherente a la palabra *poesía* tomada en su segunda acepción.¹⁸

¹⁷ *Oeuvres*, vol. 1, 1457-8.

¹⁸ 'Conversación sobre la poesía (fragmentos)', trans. by Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano, *Contemporáneos*, 26-27 (julio-agosto 1930), pp. 3-4.

Valéry identifies a fissure between literary and non-literary experience where Jiménez had tried to effect a fusion. Jiménez desired a word that would guide ‘los que las aman a las cosas’. Valéry insists, however, on a division between ‘las condiciones naturales en que espontáneamente se produjo’ an ‘emoción poética’ and another world of ‘los artificios del lenguaje’ (p. 4). The rhetoric of the passage stresses the conscious effort of artistic labour - ‘industria’, ‘reedificar’, ‘restituir [...] a voluntad’ – which he then intensifies with a scientific analogy - ‘la operación del químico dedicado a reconstruirle en todas sus partes’ (p. 4). While he does believe that conscious industry can recreate the same emotion that an experience of the world arouses in the observer, he nevertheless asserts a division between the two realms – natural and cultural. A confusion of these two spheres, as a word that is the thing or a naked poetry confuses them, leads to ‘opiniones, teorías y obras viciadas en principio’ (p. 4).

Valéry reasserts the three-way model of self-word-world that Jiménez had attempted to resolve as self-world only to find that the ambiguity of a word that is ‘la cosa misma’, an effacing rather than a submissive device, could leave the poet in a relation that is in fact self-word. It is just this priority of verbal experience that Jiménez was attempting to escape as the worst of the *modernista* inheritance. Valéry is much happier in that aesthetic line that runs from French symbolism into Spanish through *modernismo*. Yet once language is regarded not as a route to experience of the world, but as an experience in itself, it begins to lose its aura of privilege, and becomes an experience *in* the world, much like any other. Poetry can be compared to a non-representational activity, such as chemistry or surgery;¹⁹ and like other activities it is contingent upon the world in which it operates. The aestheticism of the symbolists thus establishes contact with the historicist vision of Marx which would attract Paz.

The second of the passages translated by Ortiz de Montellano opens with an epigraph by Malherbe comparing prose to walking, poetry to dance. Valéry expands on this analogy with a contrast between a contingent, utilitarian prose and a self-sufficient poetry:

La marcha, como la prosa, tiene siempre un fin preciso. Es el acto dirigido *hacia* algún objeto, cuya separación es nuestra finalidad. Son, constantemente, circunstancias actuales – la naturaleza de mi propósito, la necesidad que tenga de él, el impulso de mi deseo, el estado de mi cuerpo y la situación del terreno – las

¹⁹ See Villaurrutia, ‘Paul Valéry: Un discurso a los cirujanos’, in *Obras*, 701-4.

que ordenan a la marcha su paso, prescribiéndole su dirección, su velocidad y su término [...]

La danza es cosa diferente. Sin duda es, también, un sistema de actos pero tienen éstos su fin en sí mismos. La danza no va a ninguna parte y si persigue algo no es más que un objeto ideal, un estado, una voluptuosidad, un fantasma de flor, el éxtasis de sí misma, un extremo de vida, una cima, un punto supremo del Ser... (pp. 4-5)

Valéry entertains the contrast between a functional prose and a poetry whose end resides within itself but then undermines it: both forms of writing like both activities, he continues, ‘usa de los mismos miembros’; the poet, like the prose writer, is forced to use ‘una fabricación de uso corriente y práctico (el lenguaje) para fines excepcionales y no prácticos’ (p. 6). The language of poetry is not a transcendent, or a pure form. *Poesía pura* comes to seem an inappropriate term through which to approach the interest of the Contemporáneos in writers such as Jiménez and Valéry. Ortiz de Montellano presents the reader with a Valéry who is interested in the impurity of poems, and this theme of a transcendence revealed as a contingency recurs in the ‘Pequeños textos: Comentarios de grabados’ by Valéry, which also appeared in *Contemporáneos*, translated by Gilberto Owen:

Lo que es imposible, lo que su naturaleza le prohíbe, es tentación perpetua para el hombre [...] Mayor envidia aún sentimos por los seres que se mueven en los aires, donde, creemos, serán tan dichosos. Su necesidad es nuestro capricho. El modo obligatorio de su vida es cabalmente el tipo de nuestro sueño.²⁰

Nevertheless, Valéry does not dismiss human aspiration: while a language of daily use is the poet’s ‘modo obligatorio’, he is still allowed ‘su deseo de exaltar y explicar su ser’, a rhetoric that recalls Ureña’s praise of the ‘exaltación lírica’ in Jiménez’s work. Both Jiménez and Valéry express a desire to praise. Jiménez, however, recoils from an awareness that language can be a barrier between self and world, an awareness that Valéry and the Contemporáneos after him are willing to explore. Valéry sees language as yet another thing in the world ‘de uso corriente’. It is a short step, although not one that Valéry takes, then to view the exaltation of a poem as limited by the abstractions that, in a different rhetoric, one uses to explain the life of ‘daily use’, society and history. It is with these abstractions that Paz frequently explains his reading of *The Waste Land*. Although Valéry’s sense of contingency is expressed in the metaphor of

²⁰ *Contemporáneos*, 4 (septiembre 1928), pp. 35-6.

the human body, while Paz employs a Marxist rhetoric of society and history, there is nevertheless an underlying pattern, which both share, of exaltation checked by circumstance. Paz's thinking about this theme is not in fact confined to specifically Marxist terms, and in the 1940s especially he will open out this sense of aspiration against constriction as one of the guiding themes of his work – his collection of essays from the 40s and 50s, *Las peras del olmo*, takes its title from a proverbial expression of this theme: 'el artista trasmuta su fatalidad (personal o histórica) en un acto libre [...] El hombre es el olmo que da siempre peras increíbles' (*Peras*, 7). Valéry, as translated and commented on by the Contemporáneos, provides an exemplary model of language consciousness and an awareness of contingency. He thus falls into the line I have traced from López Velarde whose poems display a doubleness of feeling - aspiration in conflict with a critical consciousness that checks that aspiration. It is a line that leads to Eliot, who, as I shall demonstrate, was received by the Contemporáneos as one of Valéry's peers.

A number of the Contemporáneos who would come to read and, in the case of Ortiz de Montellano, translate Eliot took an interest in the work of Paul Valéry. According to Guillermo Sheridan (p. 158), Jorge Cuesta was reading Valéry from the mid-1920s, and Xavier Villaurrutia was also an admirer, as Paz recounts in *Xavier Villaurrutia en persona y en obra* (p. 45). A reader of *Contemporáneos* would pass from 'Conversación sobre la poesía (fragmentos)' to the introduction that Manguía provided for 'El páramo', and learn that 'disciplinado como Paul Valéry en la observación de métodos y formas, posee Eliot una rebuscada esterilidad' (p. 7). The comparison would not have seemed forced since the first mention of T. S. Eliot in *Contemporáneos*, which occurred in 'Guía de poetas norteamericanos' by Xavier Villaurrutia, described Eliot in terms that bring him close to Valéry:

Como Edgar Poe, Thomas Stearns Elliot [sic] es, al mismo tiempo que un poeta, un teórico de la composición. A menudo, sus conclusiones son exactas de claridad y síntesis. Quisiera Elliot, en el momento de la creación, separar el hombre y sus pasiones de la mente que crea, con el objeto de que ésta aproveche con mayor lucidez y trasmute las pasiones que la alimentan... Y añade, "no es la magnitud, la intensidad de las emociones, los componentes, lo que importa, sino la intensidad del proceso artístico, la presión, por decirlo así, bajo la cual tiene lugar la fusión." Su poesía está llena de la lucidez que exige al espíritu que crea, y de una ironía que impide a la pasión, siempre presente, desbordar. Ningún poeta de los Estados Unidos consigue una lentitud tan precisa, tan completa en sus expresiones, ni la

elegancia natural de movimientos y de imágenes. Todos los espasmos, todos los relámpagos, todas las intermitencias, están ausentes.²¹

The comparison with Poe places Eliot in that symbolist line of artistic consciousness which runs through Baudelaire to Mallarmé and Valéry. Villaurrutia notes the separation in Eliot's work of artistic process from the emotions of the artist - 'Quisiera Elliot, en el momento de la creación, separar el hombre y sus pasiones de la mente que crea.' In the first of the passages translated by Ortiz de Montellano, Valéry insisted on just such a separation between 'un estado emotivo particular' and 'esa extraña industria', the writing of the poem. The rhetoric of scientific process favoured by Valéry is in fact echoed in the quote taken from Eliot, which refers to 'fusión', most probably in direct imitation of the French poet. Eliot is viewed as a conscious, critical poet: the terms 'claridad' and 'lucidez' (twice) are used to describe his work, which displays 'una ironía que impide a la pasión presente, desbordar'. This double movement of feeling checked by irony recalls the pattern of aspiration and negation in López Velarde that I have read as a Mexican precursor of Eliot. López Velarde himself maintained that 'el sistema poético se ha convertido en sistema crítico', and he belongs in that line that runs through these poets to what Paz would retrospectively suggest was the defining characteristic of his own poetry, 'el desarrollo de una posición crítica en el interior del poema'.²²

The quote from Eliot's work occurs in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (*SW*, 46). However, Villaurrutia most probably took it not from *The Sacred Wood*, or the *Egoist* where it first appeared, but from an article that appeared in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* by Ramón Fernández, 'Le classicisme de T. S. Eliot'.²³ Guillermo Sheridan notes that the *Nouvelle Revue Française* was 'rigurosamente leída y comentada por el grupo desde, por lo menos, 1920' (p. 247), and José Gorostiza later described the Contemporáneos as 'nacidos a la sombra de la cultura francesa' (*Prosa*, 171).²⁴ Fernández insists on that separation of personal and aesthetic that Villaurrutia observes in Eliot, and that I have noted in the Contemporáneos reading of Valéry: 'Je crois qu'on ne saurait assez souligner les pages où il établit une distinction radicale entre les valeurs

²¹ *Contemporáneos*, 4 (septiembre 1928), p. 94.

²² Quoted by Paz in *Cuadrivio*, 54; 'Escribir para estar en tierra', *El Nacional*, 1 diciembre 1990, p. 16.

²³ *NRF*, 12, 137 (1 Février 1925), 246-51.

²⁴ According to Torres Bodet, *Contemporáneos* was itself based on the *Nouvelle Revue Française* and the *Revista de Occidente* (*Tiempo de arena*, 252-3).

personelles et les valeurs esthétiques' (p. 250).²⁵ Villaurrutia could also have read Eliot's 'Note sur Mallarmé et Poe' in the November 1926 issue of the *Revue*, which declared an interest in the aesthetic experiment of French symbolism and praised both Poe and Mallarmé for their 'effort pour restituer la puissance du Mot'.²⁶ Whether Villaurrutia took his knowledge of Eliot directly, or through the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, or, most likely, through a combination of the two, does not matter particularly.²⁷ What matters is that the importance that the Contemporáneos attached to the *Nouvelle Revue Française* creates a climate in which Eliot can be read and interpreted alongside other poets, such as Valéry and St.-John Perse, who appeared in the *Revue*'s pages at this time. Villaurrutia places Eliot explicitly in this European rather than a North American context, observing that 'viajes diversos llevan a Pound y Elliot a preocupaciones poéticas que no están lejos de las europeas' (p. 54). Through the *Nouvelle Revue Française* the Contemporáneos were then perhaps better versed in some of those European preoccupations than many of Pound and Eliot's peers in London. The classicism that Fernández described in Eliot was something that the Mexicans had already been prepared for by writers such as Valéry and André Gide. Jorge Cuesta would become notorious for using the same romanticism-classicism opposition that Eliot had adopted from Irving Babbitt and T. E. Hulme; and Villaurrutia would use similar terms, praising José Gorostiza as a poet who preferred 'el orden al instinto': 'Dichosos los poetas a quienes importa más estar conmovidos que parecerlo; de ellos, dice André Gide, es el reino del clasicismo' (*Obras*, 681 & 682).²⁸

The association that the Contemporáneos made between Valéry and Eliot is not an unnatural one. Eliot admired the French poet – he met and wrote on him a number of times, and had a picture of him on the wall of his office at Faber.²⁹ Coming to Eliot

²⁵ Fernández himself makes the link between Eliot and Valéry: 'Les idées d'Eliot le rapprochent [...] de Paul Valéry et des surréalistes' (p. 251).

²⁶ *NRF*, 14, 158 (1 novembre 1926), p. 526.

²⁷ In a letter to Villaurrutia of 29 November 1929, Gilberto Owen declares that 'después de todo prefiero a Valéry sobre T. S. E.' (*Obras*, p. 266), a judgement which would imply that by this stage the two poets knew Eliot's work first-hand.

²⁸ Eliot's translator, Enrique Manguía, also explores the classicism-romanticism opposition in 'Apuntes para una dicotomía humana', *Contemporáneos* 30-31 (noviembre-diciembre 1930), 254-59. Just as Eliot could be sceptical of these terms, however, suggesting in a letter to the *TLS* of 28 October 1920 that 'it would perhaps be beneficial if we employed both terms [classicism and romanticism] as little as possible' (p. 703), so Villaurrutia could argue in 'Traduciendo a Paul Valéry' (1934) that 'menos felices son las notas sobre clásicos y románticos. La diferencia entre ellos no es tan simple como le parece a Valéry...' (*Obras*, 707).

²⁹ These articles spanned Eliot's career, from 'Dante' in *SW*, to 'A Brief Introduction to the Method of Paul Valéry' (1924), 'Leçon de Valéry' (1946), an 'Introduction' to a collection of Valéry's essays, *The*

through this association brings a reader closer to many of his interests than, for example, the connection with the Metaphysical Poets that so exercised early critics.³⁰ It is a productive if partial viewpoint. Eliot had his reservations about Valéry, which I will consider in the next chapter when I come to Paz's own early critique of the Contemporáneos. Now I wish to look at the extent to which some of Eliot's own opinions on Valéry fit the reading of him that the Contemporáneos engaged in.

The separation that Villaurrutia observes in Eliot's work between the mind that creates and the passions of the man is mirrored in Eliot's own praise of Valéry for downplaying the role of 'inspiration' in the production of poetry:

The insistence, in Valéry's poetics, upon the small part played, in the elaboration of a poem, by what he calls *le rêve* – what is ordinarily called the "inspiration" – and upon the subsequent process of deliberate, conscious, arduous labour, is a most wholesome reminder to the young poet. It is corrective of that romantic attitude which, in employing the word "inspiration", inclines consciously or unconsciously to regard the poet's role, in the composition of a poem, as mediumistic and irresponsible.³¹

I have cited that vocabulary of 'conscious, arduous labour' in the first of the passages that Ortiz de Montellano translated as 'Conversación sobre la poesía (fragmentos)'. It is echoed in Villaurrutia's praise of Gorostiza for preferring 'el orden al instinto', and evinces a shared belief in an Original Sin of artistic composition – the belief that inspiration is meaningless unless checked by order.³²

This separation of the life lived and artistic product has two aspects: one is psychological – an increased self-consciousness in the artist; the other is aesthetic – an increased consciousness that the artistic product has its own characteristics, hence its own resistance to the intentions of the artist. The two aspects are co-dependent, as Eliot's parenthetical self-correction – a realization in the act of writing that the one implies the other – in 'From Poe to Valéry' attests:

This process of increasing self-consciousness – or, we may say, of increasing consciousness of language – has as its theoretical goal what we may call *la poésie pure*. (TCC, 39)

Art of Poetry (1958), and 'From Poe to Valéry', in TCC. UPUC also includes sustained discussion of the question of 'Pure Poetry'.

³⁰ Davie cites F. O. Matthiessen as an example of this approach in his own argument for a symbolist Eliot (pp. 199-200).

³¹ 'Introduction' to *The Art of Poetry* by Paul Valéry (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. xii.

³² See the quotation from T. E. Hulme that Eliot uses to conclude 'Baudelaire' (1930): "A man is essentially bad, he can only accomplish anything of value by discipline – ethical and political" (SE, 430).

The problem that arises, however, is that if the psychological and the aesthetic are separated, what, and how, does any poem mean? Valéry separated ‘las condiciones naturales en que espontáneamente se produjo [la emoción poética]’ and ‘esa extraña industria’, the writing of a poem. He attenuates the radicalism of this poetic, however, by an unexamined belief that this separate artistic process is somehow able to ‘reedificar la emoción señalada por el primer sentido de la palabra’. Valéry makes no attempt to explain how this restitution of a link between artistic product and emotional experience might be effected.

One of the key concepts of Eliot’s early criticism, the ‘objective correlative’, presented in ‘Hamlet and His Problems’ (1919), attempts, like Valéry, to save some idea of communication for a poetic that has broken the continuity between self and artistic product on which that communication seemed to depend. The Fernández article on Eliot in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* quotes the theory thus:

Nous dit Eliot, “la seule manière d’exprimer l’émotion sous une forme artistique et de trouver un “corrélatif objectif”; en d’autres termes, un ensemble d’objets, une situation, une chaîne d’événements qui constitueront la formule de cette émotion *particulière*, de façon que lorsque les faits extérieurs, qui doivent aboutir à une expérience sensorielle sont donnés, l’émotion soit immédiatement évoquée.” (p. 248)³³

Eliot’s list of terms that might provide the formula of an emotion – a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events - all have their own objective reality, or rather, their own recalcitrance. As a theory of how the artist finds an objective receptacle for his or her own emotion, the theory works well, and is familiar as the projection of psychology. Eliot however, like Valéry, attenuates his vision when he suggests that what is an objective correlative for the artist should also work for the reader, should ‘immediately evoke’ the same emotion. By the very nature of its objectivity, its resistance to the designs of the artist, that ‘objective correlative’, which can provide the formula for the emotion of the artist, is likely to provide the formula for a quite different emotion when the reader comes to it. Eliot’s use of the term ‘formula’ is a sleight of hand that attempts to bridge that discontinuity between artist and reader that the term ‘objective correlative’ establishes.

³³ The quote occurs in *SW*, 85-6.

By *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), however, which contains some of his most sustained discussion of artistic 'purism', he is more sceptical about the problem of communication.

If poetry is a form of 'communication', yet that which is to be communicated is the poem itself, and only incidentally the experience and the thought which have gone into it. The poem's existence is somewhere between the writer and the reader; it has a reality which is not simply the reality of what the writer is trying to 'express', or of his experience of writing it, or of the experience of the reader or of the writer as reader. Consequently the problem of what a poem 'means' is a good deal more difficult than it at first appears. (UPUC, 30)

The poem's existence is here somewhere between the reader and the writer, with the 'emotion' of the objective correlative merely incidental. Eliot embraces the insight of the objective correlative without attenuating the damage that insight does to the assumption that poetry is nothing if it does not communicate. He acknowledges the cursedness of the problem by making no attempt to resolve it, merely setting it aside as 'more difficult than it at first appears'.

Eliot's and Valéry's particular attempts to resolve the problems that arise when the artistic object is separated from the artist are less important than their awareness that the problem exists. What matters for the purpose of this study is that they bequeathed an awareness of this separation to Mexican writers who would work through it in their own ways. In 'Fichas sin sobre para Lazo', Xavier Villaurrutia displays his own awareness of artistic product as objective reality, rather than subjective expression:

Como el poeta sus palabras, el pintor tiene sus útiles predilectos. El poeta sale a la calle y anota una frase trunca, un equívoco, un juego de palabras, un fragmento de letrero que es casi un poema: Alto quintos ruedan vuelan. Lazo alarga los sentidos y roba un par de manos, un trozo de piso, una cortina, un niño. Luego, en su taller, con ayuda de todo esto, inventa un cuadro.³⁴

This is recognizable from Valéry and Eliot, but close also to the surrealist aesthetic of found art, which is relevant to a later Paz. There is a confusion, however, in Villaurrutia's analogy: the poet goes out into the street and finds the materials of his art – words – whereas the painter finds the referents – hands, floor and so on; yet both are regarded as objectively found. Villaurrutia later displays an awareness of the distinction when he declares that 'Lazo no ama los objetos ni los cuerpos que dibuja. Ama,

³⁴ *Contemporáneos*, 2 (julio 1928), p. 117.

simplemente, el dibujo' (p. 122). The article as a whole displays an openness, however, about the exact nature of the objective in art which is replicated in Eliot. In 'Hamlet and his Problems', 'a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events' provided the objective element of the work, not the words that described those objects and events. Swinburne is criticized in 1920 for a language that has effaced the world:

They [language and object] are identified in the verse of Swinburne solely because the object has ceased to exist, because the meaning is merely the hallucination of meaning, because language, uprooted, has adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment. (*SW*, 127)

By *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, however, it is the poem itself, rather than the objects that it describes, which has 'an existence somewhere between the writer and the reader'. In 'Hamlet', objective reality is qualified as that 'which must terminate in sensory experience'. The realization that, in a poem at least, sensory experience is of the word, not its referent, that, in fact, a sensual appreciation of words militates against their referential function, as in López Velarde's 'ubérrima ubre', comes to Eliot via the symbolists, and is evident in a similarly tentative form in the Villaurrutia. Villaurrutia presents the question that occurs to both Eliot and Valéry: where is objectivity to be found, in the world, or in the means through which one understands the world? Hugh Kenner in 'The Possum in the Cave' and *The Pound Era* contrasts a language-based, symbolist Eliot with a Pound whose poetry refers to the outside world.³⁵ The implication is that Pound's work is progressive where Eliot remains trapped in symbolism. Yet, as Donald Davie suggests, adopting the same contrast of language-centred versus objective, it is the symbolist tradition of Eliot which has enjoyed greater currency in recent philosophical thinking about literature (pp. 102 & 206).

Although, as the letter from Gilberto Owen suggests, Villaurrutia most probably had direct knowledge of Eliot's work by the late 1920s, that knowledge would undoubtedly have been gained in dialogue with writers from the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, such as Paul Valéry. The Eliot of the *Revue* favoured the artistic

³⁵ 'This [the poetry of Pound] is not the poetic of the cave, the post-symbolist signification of ineffabilities, controlled by allusion and acoustic nuance. It is mimetic in one of the old senses of mimesis: its referents exist "out there", in a place to which a Michelin map will guide you, perhaps two hours by car from Montségur. A system of words denotes that verifiable landscape', in Stephen J. Greenblatt, ed., *Allegory and Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 140. Kenner's use of the Michelin map – another form of code, or language – is a problematic example of objectivity. See also the chapter 'Words Set Free' in *The Pound Era* (London: Pimlico, 1991).

consciousness and experiment of the symbolists over the historical content that Paz found in *The Waste Land*. As I shall demonstrate in the next chapter, Paz's enthusiasm for Eliot's historical poem is matched by an equally strong hostility towards the 'artepurismo', as he describes it, which the Contemporáneos had adopted from Valéry and the *Nouvelle Revue Française*.

Paz did, however, enthuse over, and associate Eliot with, one of the post-symbolist writers that crossed the Atlantic through the French periodical: St.-John Perse.³⁶ In the February 1931 edition of *Contemporáneos* a translation appeared by Octavio G. Barreda of Perse's *Anabase*. 'El páramo' had appeared six months earlier in the July-August edition of 1930, yet more than once Paz's memory placed the two translations in the same issue:

El mismo día, la misma tarde en mi casa, en "Contemporáneos", que compraba cada mes tan pronto como salía, leí "The Waste Land" y "Anábasis". La experiencia fue devastadora... quedé deslumbrado, anonado durante meses. Fue aterrador, terrible, maravilloso...³⁷

The confusion testifies to a strong association of the two poems in Paz's mind. He describes the same ambivalent response of shock and enchantment that 'El páramo' had provoked. The association between the two poems is not merely fanciful, however. Eliot himself published a translation of *Anabase* in 1930, with a short preface, from which Barreda borrows freely. Both 'El páramo' and 'Anábasis' were examples of long poems with history in, and both, crucially, were difficult poems. Paz describes his initial reaction to them as a shock that passed understanding. The question of where, precisely, the meaning, or the coherence, of *Anabase* resides is a problem for Paz and for Eliot; their respective responses to it provide a means of exploring the relation between the two authors.

In the introduction to his translation, Barreda addresses the question of the poem's apparent lack of coherence:

³⁶ 'Anabase' appeared in *NRF* 11, 124 (1 janvier 1924). Valéry Larbaud's 'Préface pour l'Anabase' was also published in *NRF* 13, 148 (1 janvier 1926).

³⁷ 'La evolución poética de Paz', interview with William Ferguson, 'Diorama de la cultura', 2 julio 1972, p. 8. Paz made the same error in interview with Rita Guibert in 1970: 'The magazine *Contemporáneos* gave me an unforgettable jolt: I read in it and in the same issue the first Spanish translations of *The Waste Land* and St. John Perse's *Anabasis*', trans. by Frances Partridge, Ivar Ivask, ed., *The Perpetual Present: The Poetry and Prose of Octavio Paz* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), p. 32. In the Spanish version of the interview published in *PC* (1990), 'the same issue' has been excised (p. 80).

Sin duda, esta oscuridad e inconsistencia aparentes débense en parte a una deliberada supresión de nexus, de descripciones superfluas, de lazos de unión, o lo que Lucien Fabre llama con este motivo “eslabones de la cadena”.³⁸

The ‘links of the chain’ that would structure the poem have been suppressed, and the reader is left with ‘meras descripciones casi objetivas’ (p. 4). Perse described his aim as a ‘jeu, très allusif et mystérieux [...] à la limite du saisissable’.³⁹ The potentially negative aspect of disjointedness is turned round to accentuate the positive, symbolist aesthetic of suggestion. The poem’s indeterminacy clearly appealed to Eliot, and Ronald Bush criticizes a tendency in his translation to ‘heighten the opacity of the verse and emphasise the exoticism and otherworldliness of Perse’s central images’ (p. 126). Yet Eliot was not entirely comfortable with indeterminacy and suggestion as principles of organization. He still felt the need to provide a concept of structure, which he described as ‘a logic of the imagination’. Barreda refers directly to this concept in his introduction:

T. S. Eliot, a propósito del poema, se aventura a afirmar que existe una lógica de la imaginación de igual manera que existe una lógica de conceptos. (p. 2)

The explanation is worded polemically, marrying the rigorous ‘logic’ to a term that is popularly regarded as its opposite. In fact, Eliot’s mitigation of the amorphous with a form of order replays the pattern of Wordsworth’s classic definition of imagination as ‘Reason in her most exalted mood’.⁴⁰ Both definitions bring accepted terms into new relations as a means of acknowledging a phenomenon which operates beyond the conventions of available rhetoric. Eliot thus demonstrates ambivalence about his desire for order.

In an essay of 1961, ‘Un himno moderno’, Paz also entertains a conflict between disjunction and coherence:

Hoy la historia no sólo ocupa todo el espacio terrestre - ya no hay pueblos ni tierras vírgenes - sino que invade nuestros pensamientos, deshabita nuestros sueños secretos, nos arranca de nuestras casas y nos arroja al vacío público. El hombre moderno ha descubierto que la vida histórica es la vida errante. Saint-John Perse lo sabe mejor que nadie. Pero aquello que la historia separa, lo une la poesía.⁴¹

³⁸ *Contemporáneos*, 33 (febrero 1931), pp. 1-2.

³⁹ ‘Une lettre de St.-John Perse’, *Berkeley Review* (Winter 1956), p. 40; quoted in Bush, 125.

⁴⁰ *The Prelude* (1850) (XIV. 192), in *Poetical Works of Wordsworth* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 585.

⁴¹ *Puertas al campo* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1972), p. 58.

Eliot observed an apparent lack of coherence within the poem, which he answered with an occluded form of consistency that would become apparent with repeated reading – ‘a logic of the imagination’. His thinking remains focused on the poem and the source of its composition - imagination. Paz locates division outside the poem in a ‘history’ that ‘invade’, ‘deshabita’, ‘nos arranca’, ‘nos arroja’. The poem then mitigates that conflict, which is external to it: ‘aquello que la historia separa, lo une la poesía’. Paz makes a bolder claim than the *modernistas* before him, who tended to see the poem as an alternative to the conflicts of bourgeois society rather than as an agent with power to change that society. He also marks a significant distance from Eliot who rejected I. A. Richards’ assertion that poetry “‘is capable of saving us’” (*UPUC*, 124).

Paz does not explain precisely how the poem acts upon society. As the essay continues, however, he does specify the poetic image rather than ‘poetry’ as a unifying force:

La dispersión de nuestro mundo se revela al fin como viviente unidad. No la unidad del sistema que excluye la contradicción y es siempre visión parcial, sino la de la imagen poética. (*Puertas*, 59)

Paz’s reference to ‘la unidad del sistema’ may well have had Eliot, and his praise of Dante for operating within ‘a framework of mythology and theology and philosophy’, in mind (*SW*, 134). Eliot insists too rigidly on a systematic belief, he implies. Yet Eliot’s description of a ‘logic of the imagination’ in *Anabase* tactfully sidesteps the issue of systematic belief in favour of a less tangible principle of organization. Eliot had moved from the stridency of *The Sacred Wood* to a more tentative theory of poetic organization, which he would repeat in 1942, as he was composing the *Four Quartets*, when he observed ‘a logic of the emotions’ in Tennyson’s ‘In Memoriam’.⁴² It is Paz who makes the bolder, and the more questionable, assertion about Perse’s poem, and poetry in general, as a mitigation of historical conflict.

The claims that Paz makes in ‘Un himno moderno: St.-John Perse’ do in part indicate his thinking of the early 1960s rather than his initial response to Barreda’s translation of *Anabase*. His boldest statements about the value of ‘poetry’ appear after his contact with André Breton and surrealists in Paris in the 1940s. Nevertheless, his praise of a poetry which expresses a particular attitude to history does correspond to the broadly leftist rhetoric that he employs in the early 1930s. It is a rhetoric that can

⁴² Op. cit.

articulate a confusing number of different propositions, as Raymond Williams points out:

Either the arts are passively dependent on social reality, a proposition which I take to be that of mechanical materialism, or a vulgar misinterpretation of Marx. Or the arts, as the creators of consciousness, determine social reality, the proposition which the Romantic poets sometimes advanced. Or finally, the arts, while ultimately dependent, with everything else, on the real economic structure, operate in part to reflect this structure and its consequent reality, and in part, by affecting attitudes towards reality, to help *or hinder* the constant business of changing it. I find Marxist theories of culture confused because they seem to me, on different occasions and in different writers, to make use of all these propositions as the need serves.⁴³

For Paz, *The Waste Land* expresses his own ‘horror ante el mundo moderno’ (‘TSE’, 41); it articulates the experience of a particular society, but it doesn’t necessarily do anything to change it. Paz does observe a ‘secreta coherencia’ in Eliot’s poem which might answer the fragmentary experience that it records, but he does not elaborate on it. Paz’s reading of *Anabase* is more determined to express the attitude that Williams attributes to the romantic strain of Marxist cultural theory. As in the various leftist positions that Williams criticizes, there is no clear sense in Paz’s thinking of the principle on which he bases the moral judgement of social efficacy that he applies to Perse. I propose, therefore, to set Paz’s prose statements to one side and to look closely at Barreda’s translation of *Anabase* in an attempt to construct the initial connections and contrasts that a Mexican reader like Paz would have made between *The Waste Land* and Perse’s poem before he translated his response into the problematic rhetoric that I have just considered.

If *The Waste Land* presents a self that experiences disconnection from the dispersed human and natural world, ‘Anábasis’ then offers a contrasting repertory of images which express sensual connection, a form of unity, or coherence. It ranges from the simplicity of ‘el que gusta inmensamente del estragón’, to the startling perception ‘ah! cómo el cuerpo ácido de una mujer sabe manchar una túnica en el lugar de las axilas!’ (Barreda, 34 & 11). The robust sensuality of Perse is distant from the vision of sexual disjunction that runs through *The Waste Land*. Paz would later declare that ‘el erotismo de Eliot es muy poco erótico y la imagen que nos da del amor físico es sórdida’ (PC, 23). Perse, by contrast, is celebratory: ‘– Mujeres jóvenes! Y la naturaleza de un

⁴³ *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), p. 274.

país se perfuma toda’ (p. 29). Sexual appeal spreads into the natural world and is savoured as sensual experience – ‘se perfuma toda’. His images praise a world of ‘abundancia y bienestar, felicidad’ (p. 20).

As Paz observes in his essay of 1961, Perse does not provide a system of belief that can answer the horrors of the modern world, yet *Anabase* does express an exaltation that is absent from *The Waste Land*. Perse’s vision, like Eliot’s, conflates inner and outer world; the difference with Perse is that an inner exuberance meets an outer abundance, where with Eliot depression finds dearth. Perse offers a whole series of images in which the inner world communes happily with the outer. Either the outer world proves adequate to the initiative of the inner – ‘...y el mar en la mañana como una presunción del espíritu’ (p. 9), “‘Rosas, púrpura delicia: la tierra vasta a mi deseo, y quién fijará ahí los límites de esta noche?’” (pp. 13-14); or the inner to the outer – ‘Así es el mundo y no puedo más que hablar bien de él’ (p. 15); or both are conflated as inner feeling is projected onto objective description – ‘...las regiones entusiasmadas’ (p. 23). Hamlet, for Eliot, was ‘dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear’ (*SW*, 86); Perse’s narrator seems incredulous that such a situation is possible: ‘Tanta dulzura en el corazón del hombre, es posible que no llegue a encontrar su medida?’ (p. 25). Perse himself described the theme of his poem as ‘la solitude dans l’action. Aussi bien l’action parmi les hommes que l’action de l’esprit envers soi-même’.⁴⁴ He works within the same model as Eliot, the model often blamed on Descartes, of an inner world seeking accord with an outer. The problem for Paz’s reading of Perse, and it is a problem that he encounters as he attempts to redeem the vision of *The Waste Land*, is that the equanimity of Perse’s world seems to be a given. Inner and outer have by some form of grace been granted accord, just as in the early Eliot they have been denied it. The reader is not given any hint, however, of how one might progress from one state to the other. He or she is not given that point of leverage between poem and society that Paz’s ‘lo que la historia separa, la poesía lo une’ implies.

Although Perse’s narrator finds accord in the world, the destructive aspect of historical events, expressed in Paz’s string of verbs – ‘invade’, ‘deshabita’, ‘nos arranca’, ‘nos arroja’, ‘separa’ – is not entirely absent from *Anabase*. Both natural – ‘Después vino un año de vientos de occidente, y en nuestros techos lastrados de piedras negras,

⁴⁴ Interview with Pierre Mazars, *Le Figaro littéraire*, 5 novembre 1960; quoted in Arthur Knodel, *Saint-John Perse: A Study of his Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), p. 186.

todo un tema de telas vivas flotando en la delicia de la amplitud' (p. 21) - and human destruction appear:

"Id y decidles: un inmenso peligro está próximo a correr entre nosotros! Hechos incontables e infinitos, destructoras y potentes voluntades y el poder del hombre consumido como la uva en la vid..." (p. 22)

The perspective adopted by Perse's narrator is distanced from the immediate experience of destruction, however, so that potential distress is resolved into unconditional admiration for movement, or energy – 'flotando en la delicia de la amplitud' - irrespective of its consequences at an individual level. He does not resolve the destructive aspect of history; he is immune to it. López Velarde had viewed the historical events of the Mexican civil war – 'la mutilación de la metralla' – as an irruption that placed the Eden of childhood, now subverted, within an ironic perspective. Perse manages to hold the vision of historical process in a lyrical tone of praise, rather than an ironic one. As a vision it is fascinating, yet amoral; and distant from Paz's model of a destructive history resolved by a unifying poetry. It is difficult to imagine Paz resolving horror at 'invade', 'deshabita', 'nos arranca', 'nos arroja', 'separa' by regarding these actions as 'potentes voluntades'.

'Action' is a key element in Perse's description of his poem. His narrator can admire the actions of history rather than feel a victim of them. History does not evoke feelings of horror, the term that Paz uses to express his affinity with the Eliot of *The Waste Land*. *Anabase* stresses agency, whether it is the agency of senses finding pleasure, feelings finding their measure in the world, or actions expressing an amoral potency. Such an active disposition is partly enabled by the myth that Perse has chosen, the myth of conquest and foundation. *The Waste Land*, by contrast, portrayed a civilization in crisis, possibly in terminal decline. Where Eliot finds himself in a desert waiting for rain, Perse describes 'aquellos trabajos de captación de aguas vivas en las montañas' (p. 15). Paz was attracted to the myth of *The Waste Land*, but his leftist inheritance also demanded a utopian myth, what he described as 'las geometrías del futuro', that could redeem this decline ('TSE', 41). Perse provided a version of this myth. As I have argued, agency of feeling in Perse seems a given rather than something won from the position in Eliot, and it is achieved at the expense of the ethical attitude that Paz would normally insist upon towards the destructive aspect of action.

In an interview I conducted with the Mexican poet Homero Aridjis, he described *Anabase*, along with *The Waste Land*, as two of the foremost examples of the long poem in Mexico of the 1930s. *Anabase*, he explained, was the great model of ‘exaltación lírica’.⁴⁵ I have cited this term already, used by Pedro Henríquez Ureña to praise Jiménez’s work, and then by Valéry to describe the poet’s function. In *Perse*, however, the term encapsulates a much more robust sensuality than either the ‘sensualismo abstracto’ of Jiménez or the language consciousness of Valéry. It is this sensualism and celebratory tone that inhabits the poem’s images and provides at least the poem’s tonal coherence. While these images are given a further coherence by the myth of foundation that provides the poem’s theme, I am nevertheless not convinced that *Anabase* manages to unite the divisions of history in a way that would, in any rigorous sense, satisfy Paz’s terms. Sensualism, after all, which provides some of the poem’s most satisfying images of connection, is itself *ahistorical*, apart from memory and the abstractions upon which a knowledge of history depend. It is a state of innocence rather than one of resolution.

Paz’s readings of Eliot and *Perse* express two separate impulses: the one to diagnose society, the other to change it. As Raymond Williams argues, the theoretical confusion caused by these two separate impulses is typical of leftist cultural theory. Nevertheless, they are not to be discounted as actual dispositions towards the world simply because they have not reached consistent theoretical expression. Eliot and *Perse* embody separate tendencies which are evident in Paz’s own poetry and prose. While his earliest essays insist aggressively on the social responsibility of the artist, his poems, as I shall demonstrate, often engage in a more tentative dialogue between the despair of *The Waste Land* and the ‘exaltación lírica’ of *Anabase*.

Both Paz and Eliot were affected by *Perse*’s poem, yet both writers found difficulty accounting for its significance. Richard Abel notes an ‘increasing use of natural and sensuous imagery’ in Eliot’s poems after 1930, which he attributes to the experience of reading, and translating, the French poet. He suggests two possible reasons for the shift in Eliot’s work:

It is interesting that this kind of imagery seems less a discovery than a *recherche du temps perdu*, for it is often that of his youthful days in New England and St. Louis. In part, this change can be explained by Eliot’s return to the United States for his mother’s funeral in 1928 and then for his lecture tour in 1933. Certainly, too, “the advantage of a coherent traditional system of dogma and morals,” which

⁴⁵ The interview was conducted in Mexico City, 9 April 2002.

he found in Dante and which he had made more and more his own after confirmation in the Anglican church, allowed Eliot to accept and rejoice in the imagery of a natural world which before he had treated often with disapprobation.⁴⁶

Abel describes a return to prior experience rather than a new discovery and, in fact, sensory experience was a basic criterion of Eliot's early criticism, whether the 'external facts' of the 'objective correlative', 'which must terminate in sensory experience' (*SW*, 86), or his critique of ideas, which 'evade sensation and thought'.⁴⁷ Yet his consistent preoccupation with sensory experience also presented a problem. While he believed that attention to sensation could check the worst excesses of abstraction, he was also sceptical that a basic level of experience prior to any form of exegesis existed: 'if anyone assert that immediate experience, at either the beginning or end of our journey, is annihilation and utter night, I cordially agree';⁴⁸ or as he wrote Virginia Woolf of Perse's sensual poem which lacked system, 'doubt is cast on the reality of things'.⁴⁹ The question of what a poet believed, of the interpretation that they applied to their experience, cannot be dismissed. Abel, however, makes a subtle observation about the relation between belief and sensation in Eliot's reading of Perse, for he suggests that while Eliot needed to feel secure in Anglican belief before he could share Perse's joy at the natural world, there was no particular aspect of Anglican faith that directed him to this joy. The content of Eliot's belief does not matter so much as the fact that he had some belief, any belief, which could give him enough security to turn his feelings more openly to the physical world. Abel suggests that while belief may be necessary for a poet, it does not necessarily structure the life of his or her poems.

J. Hillis Miller similarly describes the process of an increasing realization of the sensual world in Eliot's later poems. Unlike Abel, however, he attempts to construct a belief that can explain the experience rather than act as a prerequisite for it. He describes Eliot's frequently open-ended presentation of the relationship between sensual experience and transcendent significance as 'a recovery of immanence',⁵⁰ a concept which he explains in his introduction:

⁴⁶ 'The Influence of St. John Perse on T. S. Eliot', *Contemporary Literature*, 14, 2 (Spring 1973), p. 232.

⁴⁷ 'In Memory of Henry James', *Egoist*, 1, 5 (January 1918), p. 2.

⁴⁸ *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 31.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Bush, 128.

⁵⁰ *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1966), p. 189.

If any spiritual power can exist for the new poetry it must be an immanent presence. There can be for many writers no return to the traditional conception of God as the highest existence, creator of all other existences, transcending his creation as well as dwelling within it. If there is to be a God in the new world it must be a presence within things and not beyond them. (pp. 9-10)

Hillis Miller's theological ambition is clearly great, but one would not have to believe in a traditional 'conception of God as the highest existence' to feel that this 'immanence' is a fudge, a kind of *deity-lite* - all of the God but none of the transcendence. The cussedness of the human situation, which bridges both experience and a capacity, or rather need, to abstract from that experience, is too neatly resolved. Hillis Miller's position recalls what Paz rather sniffily described as Pablo Neruda's 'materialismo teñido de animismo' (*Vill*, 76). Paz would never accept Eliot's God, but he was also sceptical of facile substitutes, wherein lay *his* dilemma.

Paz, like Eliot, accepted the need for interpretation, or belief, even if he was often sceptical of the specific manifestations of belief that he encountered. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, Paz's initial critique of the *Contemporáneos* centred on what he saw as a lack of belief within the group. Ironically, this critique was fed by poets such as Eliot and Perse, who had been published in *Contemporáneos*. Of course, the Eliot read by the magazine's contributors was distinct from the one understood by Paz's generation. Paz's Eliot brought a political, historical relevance back into the poem. For the *Contemporáneos*, Eliot was much closer to the *Nouvelle Revue Française* and the symbolist tradition of Valéry. As I have argued, however, these are not wholly antithetical traditions. Valéry, and Juan Ramón Jiménez more reluctantly before him, explore the constrictions that bear in upon lyric expression, and so provide a model that is easily adopted by a more historicist view of contingency. Barreda's translation of Perse then provides Paz with a poem that is a part of Eliot's world. It is in a sense a problem poem for Eliot, and for Paz also. *Anabase* raises questions about the relationship between, and relative status of, sensual experience and the interpretation of that experience. The responses of Paz and Eliot to these questions are inconclusive, just as Paz will admire *The Waste Land* as a poem that represents a certain experience while his attempts to redeem that experience are frustrated. The question of sensory experience and understanding is an epistemological one, but Valéry reframes it as an aesthetic question also – in a poem the primary experience is not simply the world one describes but the words one uses to describe the world. Paz takes time to express this

perception in his prose, although his poems display an awareness that precedes his programmatic statements. The shift of epistemological to aesthetic categories is in fact a characteristic of the symbolist tradition, which Eliot and Paz inhabit. What in one language is the balance of the humanist and the otherworldly, in another becomes the concrete against the abstract word, or language against reference – as Villaurrutia says of Lazo, ‘no ama los objetos ni los cuerpos que dibuja. Ama, simplemente, el dibujo’. To Hillis Miller’s ‘The human body and the world’s body – these are two forms of incarnation’ (p. 185) a further awareness must be added of the word’s body, which Eliot himself demonstrated when he perceived that nature is not a sensibly apprehended presence in opposition to abstraction, but itself, as a word, an abstraction: ‘That strange abstraction, “Nature”’ (*SE*, 335). The mobility of these categories is one of the issues that will characterize Paz’s use of Eliot.

PART TWO
1930-1948

Chapter Four

¿Arte de tesis o arte puro?

Paz began his writing career while studying for the *bachillerato* at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria in Mexico City. The school brought him into contact with a number of the Contemporáneos: Samuel Ramos taught there, as did José Gorostiza who, while never actually a teacher of Paz's, did discuss literature with the young student.¹ The most important figure, however, was his teacher of *Literatura hispanoamericana*, Carlos Pellicer. Paz's early studies of Hispanic literature had been confined to his grandfather's library, the contents of which ended around 1900. In the prologue to volume IV of his *Obras completas* Paz remembers 'con gratitud' how Pellicer would read his own poems to his students - 'los primeros poemas modernos que oí' (OC4, 17). It was during this period that Paz also discovered both the Contemporáneos version of recent Mexican literary history in the *Antología de la poesía mexicana moderna* of 1928, and the poets of the Spanish *vanguardia* – Federico García Lorca, Rafael Alberti, Juan Ramón Jiménez and Antonio Machado - in Gerardo Diego's *Poesía española. Antología 1915-1931*.

Links with the Contemporáneos were maintained in *Barandal* (1931-32), the magazine that Paz founded with his classmates. Carlos Pellicer, Salvador Novo and Xavier Villaurrutia all accepted invitations to provide poems for a supplement to the magazine. Yet Paz's first essay, 'Ética del artista', which was published in *Barandal*, is a critique of what Paz describes as the 'artepurismo' of the group.² Although the essay does not refer to Eliot explicitly, it does contain echoes of both 'Los hombres huecos' and Enrique Manguía's introduction to 'El páramo'. These echoes suggest that Paz was already using Eliot as a counter to the Contemporáneos reading of Paul Valéry. 'Ética' thus provides an example of the way that Paz configured Eliot within Mexican debates.

'Ética' is not just an attack on the Contemporáneos, a quite understandable attempt to place some distance between a prior generation and Paz's own; it is also an attempt to make some clear sense of the confusion between self, belief, and the aesthetic realm that *modernismo* had bequeathed. The sense that Paz makes is crude, and begs as

¹ See Paz, 'Itinerarios de un poeta', *El Nacional*, 29 noviembre 1990, p. 14.

² *Barandal*, 2, 5 (diciembre 1931), 1-5; repr. in *PL*, 113-17.

many questions as it answers. Yet the fact that Paz enters the debate at all indicates his readiness for Eliot. Eliot too displayed ambivalence about the relationship of belief to poetry, as his response to *Anabase* indicates, and I will follow the discussion of 'Ética' with a consideration of his own contradictory attitudes to artistic 'purism'.

Paz's essay opens with an apparently straightforward choice between opposing conceptions of the relationship between art and belief:

El artista ¿debe tener una doctrina completa - religiosa, política, etc. - dentro de la cual debe enmarcar su obra? ¿O debe, simplemente, sujetarse a las leyes de la creación estética, desentendiéndose de cualquier otro problema?

¿Arte de tesis o arte puro? (*PL*, 113)

Paz's insertion of 'simplemente' into his description of the purist stance clearly tips the scales in favour of an 'arte de tesis', and his presentation of the Valéry that had appeared in *Contemporáneos* as 'Conversación sobre la poesía (fragmentos)' is also manipulated:

Hay que separar, dice Valéry, las emociones que pueda suscitar un paisaje, un suceso, de la poesía. Lo primero – el estado del alma – es común a todos; lo segundo – la elaboración, la recreación de un estado poético, con puras palabras – es solamente don del poeta. "La poesía es, en realidad, nombrar las cosas, crearlas de nuevo". Y el poeta sólo debe dedicarse a eso: a hacer, con palabras, poesía. A clasificar y combinar, de la manera más agradable y bella las palabras. De esta manera, toda revolución poética no será, en el fondo, más que la substitución de una retórica por otra. (*PL*, 114)

I have argued that Valéry's distinction between the emotions aroused by a landscape and the emotions aroused by a poem is a vital one. It allows me to replace a misleading rhetoric of 'purism' with the idea of language-consciousness, following the critic Guillermo Sucre.³ Paz, however, seems determined in 'Ética' to evade Valéry's insight, and works to undermine his distinction. Valéry had separated the emotions that language arouses from the emotions that 'los objetos o las circunstancias más diversas' could provoke. Paz subtly changes 'circunstancias' to 'sucesos', circumstances to events. Valéry's general attack on the idea of unmediated perception when applied to poems, a form of language, thus becomes an attempt to exclude political or historical subject matter – 'events' – from poetry. He is placed in a polemical relation to a debate about political commitment which was quite alien to his purposes. Paz entangles Valéry further in this position by extrapolating from the distinction between world and word a

³ 'Poesía hispanoamericana y conciencia del lenguaje', op. cit.

defence of elitism which sets aside what is ‘común a todos’ in favour of what is ‘solamente don del poeta’. The use of trivializing qualifiers – ‘agradable y bella’ – to describe the poetic activity of the *artepuristas* then secures his case.

Paz’s interpretation of Valéry attempts to bring the French poet into a political debate that was alien to him. The terms of this debate are predominantly Marxist, with references ‘al proceso de división del trabajo’ and ‘medios dialécticos’ (PL, 114 & 115). They lead Paz naturally to attack the idealization of a pure art separate from other cultural forms. He describes his own project thus:

No es una consideración estética de lo que es el arte en sí, desligado de otras formas culturales como la religión, la pasión patriótica o doctrinaria. (PL, 113)

As I argued in the previous chapter, Valéry’s own thinking amounts to a thorough critique of the idealization of art. Valéry’s language-consciousness insists upon a realization that the matter of poetry is subject to the contingencies of the language in which it is expressed. His conception of poetic activity as conscious labour with intransigent materials aimed to portray poetry as yet another activity within a culture, as the analogy he drew between poetry and surgery demonstrated. Yet in ‘Ética’, Paz denies this aspect of Valéry’s thought and places him in contrast to an art that has ‘un valor testimonial e histórico parejo a su calidad de belleza’ (PL, 113). It is here that a role for Paz’s reading of Eliot begins to emerge in this polemic. It is precisely a ‘valor testimonial e histórico’ that he found in *The Waste Land*, and which he saw as an answer to the anti-historical bias of symbolism, and, by extension, the work of the Contemporáneos: ‘El simbolismo había expulsado a la historia del poema; con *The Waste Land* regresa al poema el tiempo histórico, concreto’ (‘TSE’, 41).

Paz’s call for an art that has ‘un valor testimonial e histórico’ encounters a number of difficulties, however. The first is that since he is drawn to the Marxist view that all art is the product of historical circumstance, ‘testimonial e histórico’ is less a positive virtue than the inescapable condition of any given art work. His uncertainty over this question leads him to argue that *artepurismo* is itself a consequence of historical conditions:

Desde un punto de vista histórico, la tesis del arte puro es una consecuencia, como la Reforma, la Revolución francesa, el individualismo económico, de la disgregación del orden católico de la Edad Media. El hombre “pierde toda relación con el mundo”. Es el hombre de Kant. Se pierde todo sentido de

humanidad trascendente. Y es que al hombre de ahora, dice Landsberg, no sólo le falta una religión interior, sino una exteriorización de su religiosidad. Falta de sentido del conjunto, del que nos habla Waldo Frank. De aquí seguramente la incomprensión que de la obra artística tienen otros sectores de la vida contemporánea. De ahí, también la indiferencia del artista por todo lo que no sea, exclusivamente, artístico. (PL, 114-15)

Precisely because of their indifference to ‘todo sentido de humanidad trascendente’ the *artepuristas* are a natural consequence of their moment in history. A contradiction emerges between Paz’s call for an art that witnesses history and one that espouses a particular belief that can act upon it. Paz is forced, therefore, to desert his initial claims for an art of testimony in favour of an art that can mitigate ‘la disgregación del orden católico de la Edad Media’. This analysis draws him into an unexpected sympathy with *The Waste Land*’s own reading of history, at least as presented by Enrique Mangua in his introduction to ‘El páramo’:

Una vez extraviada el *anima mundi*, la vida no posee ya un significado sobrenatural como en el curso de la Edad Media; el hombre ya no siente unidos sus momentos por medio de esas milagrosas cadenas de la fe y de la piedad. (Mangua, 11)

The reference to religious belief as a positive model is more than a temporary lapse in Paz’s argument; his subsequent detailing of an ‘arte de tesis’ blends political and religious rhetoric with little apparent discrimination. He groups artists together approvingly that share ‘motivos religiosos, políticos o simplemente doctrinarios’ (PL, 115). He also opposes ‘una posición racionalista y abstracta’ with one that is ‘mística y combativa’, and enthuses over ‘la fe’ and ‘el impulso de elevación y de eternidad’ that drive a culture towards ‘un fin extrahumano’ (PL, 115). Paz has employed a Marxist rhetoric of historical analysis, but then has found in that analysis a need for belief that removes him from a conventional Marxist position. A serious question then arises about the foundation of his ‘arte de tesis’. If it is not justified by his Marxist approach does it receive its authority from a secular belief in human experience, or from a transcendent source? At one point he claims of his own generation that ‘como el mejor arte del pasado, su arte es de intención reformadora o simplemente humana en el buen sentido del término’ (PL, 115); but that ‘en el buen sentido del término’ seems to evade rather than clarify, and he also asserts: ‘Que hay un destino manifiesto a través de todos los tiempos, que obliga al hombre a realizar la voluntad de la vida y de Dios’ (PL, 116).

Towards the end of his career, Paz claimed that ‘mi fascinación ante *The Waste Land* nunca me hizo cerrar los ojos ante la incompatibilidad entre mis convicciones y las ideas y esperanzas que inspiran a ese poema’ (‘TSE’, 41). Yet ‘Ética’ shares more with Eliot and his own use of Medieval Catholic Europe than this comment would imply. Among the examples that Paz supplies of historical periods when an ‘arte de tesis’ predominated, he explains that ‘La Edad Media, época en que la misma Filosofía se hace sierva de la Teología, tiene un arte al servicio de Dios y de la Iglesia militante’ (PL, 115). He even draws on Dante as a counter to

el caso excepcional de Góngora, grande y alto poeta, aunque poeta al fin de y para decadentes, no comparable a Dante, agotador de la esencia y el sentido de una época. (PL, 115-16)⁴

It is very unlikely that Paz would have known Eliot’s essays on Dante at this time, and although Munguía mentions the Italian poet, he gives little idea of his importance within Eliot’s scheme.⁵ Nevertheless, George Santayana, whose *Three Philosophical Poets* had provided a model for Eliot’s own use of Dante, was known in Mexico, and Enrique Munguía, in a discussion of Walter Lippman, one of Santayana’s disciples, contrasted the contemporary situation, as both Eliot and ‘Ética’ did, with ‘la edad unificada de Dante y de Santo Tomás de Aquino’.⁶ In a sense, Paz did not have to know much of Eliot directly, because assumptions and vocabulary that had influenced Eliot were also current in Mexico. There is, nevertheless, an awareness of Eliot, however rudimentary, within ‘Ética’. Paz’s call that ‘Hemos de ser hombres completos, íntegros’ (PL, 116) is almost certainly an allusion to *The Hollow Men* which becomes fully explicit in a later attack on the Contemporáneos, ‘Pablo Neruda en el corazón’ (1938).

Manuel Ulacia attempts to vitiate the significance of the religious rhetoric in ‘Ética’, observing that ‘no hay una relación coherente’ between this essay and Paz’s

⁴ Paz had probably not read Dante at this stage. In his interview with Rita Guibert (1970), he reveals that: ‘El año pasado estuve en Pittsburgh y leí a Dante. Fue una gran experiencia. Descubrí que Dante es el gran poeta de Occidente. Yo no lo sabía’ (PC, 81).

⁵ Munguía compares Eliot’s use of metaphor to Dante’s (p. 10), and also mentions Dante as one among several authors to whom Eliot alludes in *The Waste Land* (p. 13).

⁶ Paz describes the influence of Santayana and Eliot on the essays of Villaurrutia in *Vill*, 45; Munguía, ‘Ética y maquinismo’, *Contemporáneos*, 28-29 (septiembre-octubre 1930), p. 179. Although Munguía starts with an Eliotic reference to the age of Dante, he arrives at a humanist conclusion that ‘el hombre debe, a solas, crearse a sí mismo’, which would not have satisfied Eliot. Munguía appears to have read Eliot’s own stance as essentially humanist. On 12 October 1939 he wrote José Gorostiza: ‘Sabrá usted, por cuanto se refiere a Eliot, que desde marzo de este año se suspendió la publicación de *The Criterion* porque ya nadie se interesaba en Inglaterra por una actitud de humanismo crítica hacia los problemas de la política y de la literatura’, *José Gorostiza, Epistolario (1918-1940)* (México: Memorias Mexicanas, 1995), p. 394.

earliest poems.⁷ Yet the problems that it raises concerning the role of belief in poetry do find expression, and particularly in those poems where Eliot has a presence. Before moving on to Paz's earliest poems, however, I wish to show how the confusions of 'Ética', some of which could be attributed to Paz's youth, are in fact shared by the Contemporáneos and Eliot. My aim is to enable a study of influence not as coherent vision possessed by single authors but as a series of preoccupations and contradictions that can be shared by a number of authors. It is within this shared set of preoccupations and contradictions that the individual negotiations of influence take place.

The Contemporáneos position on Pure Poetry was never entirely consistent, and it certainly does not fit the charge of 'Ética' comfortably as a simple concern to 'combinar, de la manera más agradable y bella, las palabras' (PL, 114). A number of different statements from José Gorostiza, one of the group's most lucid spokespersons, indicate that the Contemporáneos themselves, like Paz, were engaged in questions about where the value of poems lay; and like Paz they produced more than a single answer. In 'La poesía actual de México' (1937) Gorostiza describes their attitude more as a humanism than a purism:

La idea de pureza se refirió siempre al contenido de la poesía; en otras palabras éste sólo es el que deberá ser específicamente poético, puesto que no podría ser en pureza ni religioso, ni científico, ni filosófico, ni histórico. De ahí nadie pudo inferir, como malévolamente se ha hecho, que poesía pura signifique poesía inhumana o deshumanizada, pues el mundo poético se edifica precisamente en las zonas más vivas del ser: el deseo, el miedo, la angustia, el gozo. . . en todo lo que hace en fin hombre a un hombre. (*Prosa*, 166)

The group's polemic against Ortega y Gasset's *La deshumanización del arte* (1925) lurks behind this statement. Gorostiza's willingness to propose a basis of significance in human emotion – 'las zonas más vivas del ser' – adds a dimension to their work that 'Ética' would deny them. In the same essay Gorostiza does accept, however, that their consciousness of the aesthetic, their pursuit of ideal form, attenuated the human value – what he now refers to as 'lo vivo' – of their work:

Hay que ver cómo, nacido de una repugnancia no tanto por la suntuosa vacuidad modernista como por las orgías sentimentales del romanticismo, este rigor evoluciona hacia un ideal de forma – el de mantener puros los géneros dentro de

⁷ *El árbol milenario: Un recorrido por la obra de Octavio Paz* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg/Círculo de Lectores. 1999), p. 38.

sus propios límites – que empieza por eliminar de la poesía sólo los elementos patéticos, pero que acaba, cada vez más ambicioso, por eliminar todo lo vivo. (*Prosa*, 170)

The sense that Gorostiza gives of one principle gradually sliding into another and then another - ‘este rigor evoluciona hacia una ideal de forma [...] que empieza [...] pero que acaba...’ - indicates how slippery the attempt was, and still is, to locate the significance of poems.

One temptation, which he resists here, is to find in art itself all the significance one needs. It is not a temptation to which he was always immune, however, and in ‘El teatro de orientación’ (1932) he reveals a stance that is more recognizable from the critique of ‘Ética’:

El arte no tiene ni puede tener otro fin que el mismo. La teoría del arte por el arte es filosóficamente correcta. Pero si cumple su fin – esto es: si se cumple él mismo, si existe, si es en verdad el arte - , propagará fatalmente los más altos ideales humanos de una época, realizando así, en el más puro sentido de la palabra, una función política insustituible... De lo contrario, el arte no sería más que un complicado pasatiempo, un sutilísimo juego a caer sin caer, como el del arte puro, que si se expresa deja de ser puro y si no se expresa deja de ser arte. (*Prosa* 27)

In what is perhaps an oversubtle distinction, ‘pure art’ is distinguished from ‘art for art’s sake’. The fact that Gorostiza is able to negotiate the definition of pure art in this way indicates how far it was from a simple dogma among the Contemporáneos; rather, as I have argued, it provided a means for them to approach the problem of where the value of poems lay. These three statements share a common concern to argue for significance in poems, without wishing that significance to be translated into terms that are not proper to poetry. The fact that he produces a number of different responses indicates the cussedness of the problem.

Like Gorostiza and Paz, Eliot was not entirely consistent in his attempts to account for the significance of poems; he too attempted to negotiate his way through a consciousness of what is proper to art, and at the same time a sense of value that is not solely artistic. In his revision of ‘Dante’ (1919) for *The Sacred Wood*, he added an attack on Paul Valéry, and most specifically Valéry’s attempt to locate the significance of poetry purely in human emotion, what for Gorostiza were ‘las zonas más vivas del ser’:

No emotion is contemplated by Dante purely in and for itself. The emotion of the person, or the emotion with which our attitude appropriately invests the person, is never lost or diminished, is always preserved entire, but is modified by the position assigned to the person in the eternal scheme. (*SW*, 141)

The humanist bias of the Contemporáneos is not, in itself, enough. Human emotion is meaningless unless experienced within some system of belief or, in Paz's terms, as part of a 'tesis':

Dante helps us to provide a criticism of M. Valéry's 'modern poet' who attempts 'to produce in us a *state*'. A state, in itself, is nothing whatever. (*SW*, 144)⁸

Eliot was, of course, a great admirer of Valéry. However, his own need for a frame in which experience could be ordered did cause him in 1920 to lament the absence of what he described, in his introduction to *The Art of Poetry* (1958), as a 'criterion of seriousness' in Valéry's work:

The one complaint which I am tempted to lodge against Valéry's poetics, is that it provides us with no criterion of *seriousness*. He is deeply concerned with the problem of process, of how the poem is made, but not with the question of how it is related to the rest of life in such a way as to give the reader the shock of feeling that the poem has been to him, not merely an experience, but a serious experience. (*AOP*, xxiii-iv)

Eliot describes a lack of relation between Valéry's poems and a sense of value in life. Yet the very language in which Eliot explains this 'criterion of seriousness' does not insist upon a belief that transcends the human, but returns the reader to human emotion – 'the shock of feeling that the poem...'. Eliot relates seriousness to emotional experience here – 'las zonas más vivas del ser' - a tendency which is evident throughout his work and which conflicts with his classicist leaning towards transcendent belief. In his discussion of Shelley, he requires that belief itself be 'founded on the facts of experience' (*UPUC*, 96). At the same time he was sceptical, as I have argued, that the facts of experience could exist without some belief: 'Immediate experience, at either the beginning or end of our journey, is annihilation and utter night' (*KE*, 31). Eliot is thus

⁸ In a note to 'Dante' (1929), Eliot argued that belief was not only desirable in poetry, but inescapable: 'It would appear that 'literary appreciation' is an abstraction, and pure poetry a phantom; and that both in creation and enjoyment much always enters which is, from the point of view of 'Art', irrelevant' (*SE*, 271).

torn between a need for belief and an equal need to relate his poetry to human, emotional experience – a conflict that ‘Ética’ itself is undecided upon.

Eliot was at least partially sympathetic to the humanist tendency in the work of the Contemporáneos. He would have rejected Gorostiza’s claim, however, that ‘la teoría del arte por el arte es filosóficamente correcta’. He consistently resisted Matthew Arnold’s attempts to make art itself a substitute for belief:

For Wordsworth and for Shelley poetry was a vehicle for one kind of philosophy or another, but the philosophy was something believed in. For Arnold the best poetry supersedes both religion and philosophy [...] The most generalised form of my own view is simply this: that nothing in this world or the next is a substitute for anything else; and if you find that you must do without something, such as religious faith or philosophic belief, then you must just do without it. (*UPUC*, 113)

One of the aspects of Valéry’s thought which he most admired was that a scepticism about beliefs in poetry did not then lead to a belief in poetry itself as an ultimate value:

To the extreme self-consciousness of Valéry must be added another trait: his extreme scepticism. It might be thought that such a man, without belief in anything which could be the subject of poetry, would find refuge in a doctrine of ‘art for art’s sake’. But Valéry was much too sceptical to believe even in art. (*TCC*, 39)

This admiration of Valéry’s scepticism runs deep for Eliot.⁹ His article of 1919 on Henry Adams suggests that he identified with a scepticism which he describes as ‘the Boston doubt’, but which, in Adams’s case, lead to a dead end: ‘the pleasure of demolition turned to ashes in his mouth’.¹⁰ Yet scepticism is a respectable alternative to the path that Eliot himself chose, and it suggests that he did not consider that belief in itself is a good thing, as the varied examples of an ‘arte de tesis’ paraded in ‘Ética’ imply. Eliot was much more sympathetic than the Paz of ‘Ética’ to ‘la obra escéptica y corrosiva del hombre individualista, estrechamente hombre, sin sentido religioso’ (*PL*, 115).¹¹

⁹ See ‘Leçon de Valéry’, in *Paul Valéry vivant* (Marseilles: Cahiers du Sud, 1946), p. 74, for a sustained homage to Valéry’s sceptical intelligence.

¹⁰ ‘A Sceptical Patrician’, *Athenaeum*, 4647 (23 May 1919), p. 361.

¹¹ In *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 29, he preserved his sympathy with scepticism by distinguishing it from pyrrhonism: ‘Scepticism is a highly civilized trait, though when it declines into pyrrhonism, it is one of which civilization can die. Where scepticism is strength, pyrrhonism is weakness: for we need not only the strength to defer a decision, but the strength to make one’.

Eliot consistently opposed both Matthew Arnold and the theory ('if it can be called a theory', he tartly observed) of 'art for art's sake' (*SE*, 442). Yet, as I have argued, the aesthetic awareness of post-symbolist poetry makes it difficult not to confer some value on art itself. In *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* he does, in spite of his opposition to Arnold, allow a degree of autonomy for poems:

Any theory which relates poetry very closely to a religious or a social scheme of things aims, probably, to *explain* poetry by discovering its natural laws; but it is in danger of *binding* poetry by legislation to be observed - and poetry can recognise no such laws. (*UPUC*, 139)

Poetry is, to an extent at least, a law unto itself, and its own properties do have an ethical dimension, as was evident in his early praise of Mallarmé for finding 'his sincerity, simply by close attention to the actual writing' ('MTP', 14).

Eliot grappled with both sides of the debate that 'Ética del artista' enters. On the one hand, he would argue that when criticism occupies itself solely with 'implications moral, social, religious or other' then 'the poetry becomes hardly more than a text for a discourse'; while on the other, 'if you stick too closely to the "poetry" and adopt no attitude towards what the poet has to say, you will tend to evacuate it of all significance' (*UPUC*, 64).¹² By 1948 Eliot certainly felt that the tradition represented by Valéry, which Paz's essay attacks, had 'gone as far as it can go':

What will take its place I do not know. An aesthetic which merely contradicted it would not do. To insist on the all-importance of subject-matter, to insist that the poet should depend upon inspiration and neglect technique, would be a lapse from what is in any case a highly civilized attitude to a barbarous one. (*TCC*, 41)

Nevertheless, the solution of 'Ética', which asserted the demands of an 'arte de tesis' above 'las leyes de la creación estética', would still appear 'barbarous', and Eliot maintained that the tradition of which Valéry was a part had offered some of the most significant modern poems:

But I recognize first that within this tradition from Poe to Valéry are some of those modern poems which I most admire and enjoy; second, I think that the

¹² Torres Bodet's response to the charge of *deshumanización* is remarkably similar to Eliot's argument: 'No hay victoria sin enemigo y no hay arte sin materia humana que estilizar. Alcanzar la pureza clásica por ausencia de humanidad es proclamar la conveniencia de luchar con fantasmas', 'La deshumanización del arte', *Nosotros*, 52 (enero-abril 1926), p. 254. The coincidence is unlikely to be the result of direct influence but provides further evidence that the Mexicans were engaged in similar debates to Eliot.

tradition itself represents the most interesting development of poetic consciousness anywhere in that same hundred years; and finally I value this exploration of certain poetic possibilities for its own sake, as we believe that all possibilities should be explored. (TCC, 42)

These poems were not simply an elaborate game, but represented a valuable 'development of poetic consciousness', a contribution to experience.

The conflict between human experience, extra-human belief, and aesthetic awareness is unresolved in Eliot, as it is unresolved among the Contemporáneos and in 'Ética'. Thus Eliot can be commandeered to support either Paz or the Contemporáneos; he is either the contemporary of Valéry, or he represents a need for a more positive assertion beyond Valéry's scepticism. It is this unresolvedness, and the willingness of Paz to enter such debate, that provides a productive foundation for their relationship in Paz's poems.

Paz's earliest poems, published in various magazines and periodicals before his first book, *Luna silvestre*, appeared in 1933, sit oddly with the polemic exercised in 'Ética'. 'Ética' expressed a cavalier attitude to 'las leyes de la creación estética' (PL, 113), yet Paz studied these rules fastidiously as a part of his own poetic apprenticeship. In the prologue to volume XIII of his *Obras completas*, he describes finding *Retórica y poética* by Narciso Campillo in his grandfather's library:

Lo leí y releí. No comulgaba con la estética neoclásica del autor pero sus lecciones y, sobre todo, sus ejemplos, tomados de los clásicos, me llevaron por el buen camino [...] Desde entonces el interés por la prosodia española no me abandona: la poesía es ante todo una construcción rítmica y ni siquiera el llamado verso libre escapa a la ley del ritmo. (OC13, 17-18)¹³

Although he rejected Campillo's neo-classical aesthetic, his consciousness of a poem as a technical construction shares affinities with both neo-classical and *artepurista* thinking. Earlier in the prologue, he describes poetic influence as imitation: 'el aprendizaje comienza con la imitación' (OC13, 16). Since his earliest poems depended on available models that displayed technical accomplishment, he was drawn inevitably

¹³ Paz may well have Eliot's 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*' (1917) in mind here: '*Vers libre* has not even the excuse of a polemic; it is a battle-cry of freedom, and there is no freedom in art' (TCC, 184).

towards the Contemporáneos, and most specifically towards Carlos Pellicer, his teacher at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria.

In 'Los pasos contados', Paz describes his enthusiasm as a youth for 'poetas iluminados por una alegría solar, como Carlos Pellicer, Gerardo Diego, Rafael Alberti', what Anthony Stanton describes as 'la vanguardia lúdica'.¹⁴ Paz's first published poem 'Juego' declares that 'Jugaré con los meses y los años'¹⁵ in a clear imitation of Pellicer's 'Estudio' from *Colores en el mar y otros poemas* (1921):

Jugaré con las casas de Curazao,
pondré el mar a la izquierda
y haré más puentes movedizos.
¡lo que diga el poeta!¹⁶

This playfulness, and delight in the agency of the poet's own imagination, is partly a response to the tail-end of *modernismo*. In 'Homenaje a la alegría' Gabriel Zaid describes Pellicer as an alternative to the inheritance left by Amado Nervo and Enrique González Martínez, in which

el tono que domina es elegante y doliente. La hora, vespéral. Hay un desasimiento que no acaba de ser desasimiento, hay una cierta complacencia en la propia tristeza.¹⁷

Paz's own poem enters this polemic and uses Pellicer to give the grey twilight world of late *modernismo* a good shake:

Quizá asesine a un crepúsculo,
para que, desangrado,
tiña de púrpura una nube blanca. (Stanton, 23)

¹⁴ Paz, 'Los pasos contados', *Camp de l'arpa*, 74 (abril 1980), p. 52; Stanton, *Las primeras voces del poeta Octavio Paz (1931-1938)* (México: Ediciones Sin Nombre, 2001), p. 24.

¹⁵ 'El Nacional Dominical' (supl. de *El Nacional*) (7 junio 1931), p. 2; reproduced in Stanton, 22. Paz's earliest poems were uncollected until volume XIII of his *Obras completas* appeared in 1999. This is not a reliable document for a historical study, since Paz revised many of the poems included. In the case of 'Juego' and 'Cabellera', which I discovered after my research trip to Mexico, and which I have been unable to trace from England, I have taken quotations from Anthony Stanton's *Las primeras voces...*, which refers to the first published versions of the texts. Stanton also provides a complete bibliography of Paz's early poems from 1931 to 1942 (pp. 97-99). I have quoted from the original text in the case of poems that demonstrate a direct influence of T. S. Eliot.

¹⁶ Pellicer, *Antología breve* (México: FCE, 1995), p. 11.

¹⁷ *Leer poesía* (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1976), p. 82.

In Pellicer Paz finds a delight, both in the natural world and in the poet's own creative powers, which provides an alternative to the self-satisfied melancholy of the late-*modernistas*. This stress on the agency of the poetic imagination recalls the St.-John Perse of *Anabase*, and another of Paz's early poems, 'Cabellera', carries an epigraph from the French poet: 'Y mi pensamiento no es ahora extraño al del marinero.'¹⁸ Although Anthony Stanton argues convincingly that Pellicer, rather than Perse, is the dominant presence in this poem, its marine atmosphere of 'fragancias salinas' and 'brisas tropicales' would be equally at home in *Anabase* (Stanton, 29 & 30). Paz seems to have associated the two poets as examples of imaginative agency, or what Homero Aridjis describes as 'exaltación lírica'.

Imaginative agency has a political aspect; it is a form of action in the world. Paz praises this aspect of St.-John Perse's work – 'lo que la historia divide, la poesía lo une'. Gabriel Zaid describes Pellicer in terms that blend the political, or historical, with the imaginative, and which incidentally bring *Anabase* to mind:

Pellicer busca la nueva patria hacia fuera, en la novedad primigenia de la Creación que empieza a ser poblada. Tiene la confianza creadora de un fundador de ciudades, el optimismo cristiano de la generación del Ateneo, los grandes vuelos de Vasconcelos, la desenvoltura de un ciudadano del mundo. (p. 83)

Like Perse, Pellicer looks for a new land and to found new cities. The mention of Vasconcelos is significant as an example of the politically active intellectual, with his injunction to 'hacer cosas', which would commonly be turned against the Contemporáneos.

As a form of political orientation, the 'exaltación lírica' of Pellicer and Perse is analogous to Paz's 'arte de tesis'; they both express an impulse towards action in the world. Yet they also wish to suggest that this action upon the world is somehow derived from it. Paz wants to found a 'tesis' on an art with 'valor testimonial e histórico'; similarly, the playfulness in Pellicer is both a transformation of the world, and a recognition of the world as it exists beyond the poet's powers. The realization that he cannot claim the outside world as a foundation for his action upon it leaves the Paz of 'Ética' in a confusion. Is his 'arte de tesis' then 'humano, en el buen sentido del término' or dedicated to 'un fin extrahumano'? In Pellicer, the burden falls squarely

¹⁸ 'El Nacional Dominical' (supl. de *El Nacional*) (2 agosto 1931), p. 3; quoted in Stanton, 27.

upon the human, the poet's own creative self. As Gorostiza describes it: 'El poema [...] crece [...] por la sola fuerza del ímpetu lírico' (*Prosa*, 173).

But the self alone is not enough. Once the poem relies solely on the force of lyric impulse, then the world loses substance. Paz's 'Cabellera' progresses from a sense of plenitude to unreality:

Cabellera, cambiante de olas,
apenas presentida, irreal,
como deseo de viaje,
como la sombra del rumor del viento
en el corredor del mar. (Stanton, 32)

This sense of absence is the other side of the 'exaltación lírica' found in Pellicer and Perse. It is the unreality that seeps into a world that has been too comprehensively imagined. Pellicer was himself aware of this movement. In 'Deseos', what appears to be another example of delight in the powers of imaginative vision - 'Todo lo que yo toque / se llenará de sol!' - becomes a version of the Midas myth, a cry for release:

Déjame un solo instante
cambiar de clima el corazón,
beber la penumbra de una cosa desierta... (Pellicer, 29)

A plenitude that is only human results in a desire for negation. This pattern appears in Paz's poems 'Cabellera' and 'Orilla', which engage Pellicer directly. It is through Eliot, however, a poet compelled, according to the introduction that Ángel Flores provided for *Tierra baldía*, to 'mirar pavorosamente las entrañas blancas del silencio' (Flores, 9), that Paz will explore this version of a *via negativa* more thoroughly.

The first of Paz's poems to show clear evidence of his Eliot reading is 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada'.¹⁹ After 'Juego', one of the most striking characteristics of 'Nocturno' is that the 'exaltación lírica' of Pellicer has been relinquished. As Anthony Stanton describes it: 'El sujeto queda ahora en un papel pasivo, como testigo marginado de una realidad que le es ajena y a la cual, sin embargo, está condenado' (Stanton, 36). Stanton sees the possible influence of *The Waste Land* on both the poem's form and its allusions to a now defunct mythology:

¹⁹ *Barandal*, 4 (noviembre 1931), 7-9.

Más que en la forma vanguardista (fragmentarismo, paralelismo simultáneo y collage en *The Waste Land*), la posible influencia de Eliot reside en la intención contrastiva y en las alusiones a una mitología arruinada en una localización urbana. (Stanton, 42)

Yet the form is closer to *The Hollow Men* than to *The Waste Land*. The poem's opening line, 'Ésta es la ciudad del silencio', mirrors the syntax of 'This is the dead land. / This is the cactus land' in Eliot's later poem.²⁰ More significant, however, is the pattern of assertion and negation that Paz found in León Felipe's translation, 'Los hombres huecos':

Y nuestras voces ásperas
cuando cuchicheamos
no tienen timbre ni sentido [...]

Ojos que no me atrevo a mirar de frente cuando sueño
En el reino del sueño de la muerte
No se ven estos ojos. (Felipe, 132 & 138)

'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada' presents the reader with 'Los números mágicos exhaustos' and

Las fórmulas y los conjuros,
impronunciables, borrados de los bloques eternos. ('Nocturno', 7)

This last example even uses the line break of *The Hollow Men* to dramatize the movement from assertion to negation.

That Paz should turn to the form of *The Hollow Men* rather than *The Waste Land* is hardly suprising. He has declared that he learnt his craft through imitation. While Manguía's introduction to 'El páramo' provided an extensive discussion of *The Waste Land*'s significance, his prose translation was not a model that could be readily imitated. León Felipe's 'Los hombres huecos', by contrast, had followed Eliot's relation of syntax to line-ending closely. The presentation of pre-Columbian myth in 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada' then marries a general sense of historical decline that recalls *The Waste Land* with the specific form of *The Hollow Men*.

²⁰ Although Eliot described *The Hollow Men* in a letter to Richard Aldington of 15 November 1922 as a departure from *The Waste Land* – 'I am now feeling toward a new form and style', *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 1: 1898-1922* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 596 – B. C. Southam speculates that these lines of *The Hollow Men* 'probably belong to the material discarded from *The Waste Land*', *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 6th edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 213.

As Stanton points out (p. 38), this is the first reference to pre-Columbian mythology in Paz's poetry; but the native trope is shaped by Eliot's influence. The poetic form of assertion and negation within which this mythology appears determines Paz's attitude towards it. Critical debate on *The Waste Land* has divided over the function of myth in the poem. Does it, following Eliot's 'Ulysses, Order, Myth' provide a means 'of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history',²¹ or is it, as Ronald Bush argues (p. 96), simply an afterthought that is extraneous to the main interest of the poem? In 'Nocturno' it is now decidedly unefficacious. Paz marries the form of *The Hollow Men* to Manguía's reading of *The Waste Land*'s 'mythic method' as a symptom of historical decline rather than as a revival of past beliefs.

Yet the myth that is negated in 'Nocturno' is not myth as such, but language – 'Las fórmulas y los conjuros / impronunciables...'.²² 'Ética del artista' had attempted to deny the significance of language in favour of history and belief. Here Paz meditates, in a poem, that is, in language, on a language that has disappeared. Any claims for the eternal significance of poetry are undermined, with perhaps a sideways glance at Juan Ramón Jiménez's *Eternidades* – what abides is blank stone; the language itself is illegible.²³

The theme of language introduces a 'conciencia metapoética', as Stanton describes it (p. 40), which allows Paz to extend the application of the theme of negation that the form of *The Hollow Men* has given him. It does not simply portray a state of feeling, with the implication that this state of feeling is symptomatic of a wider historical decline, but it also dramatizes his battle with conflicting poetic influences. Stanton notes that towards the end of 'Nocturno' Pellicer is brought into dialogue with the more somber vision that he traces to Eliot (p. 40):

(Los viaje azules de los pájaros
jamás escucharon silencio
y sombra muerta tan igual.) ('Nocturno', 8)

²¹ *Dial*, 75, 5 (November 1923), p. 483.

²² It is precisely the theme of language that Paz has brought to *The Hollow Men*, which focuses on 'images': 'Here the stone images / Are raised, here they receive / The supplication of a dead man's hand' (*CPP*, 84).

²³ This image in 'Nocturno' finds an echo in Paz's later description of *The Waste Land* itself: 'a través de tantos años y mutaciones, ese poema sigue siendo para mí un obelisco cubierto de signos, invulnerables ante los vaivenes del gusto y las vicisitudes del tiempo' ('TSE', 40). The dual application of this image to the world that the poem describes and to the poem itself implies a metapoetic consciousness, which is evident in 'Nocturno', and which has parallels in the self-conscious practice of Jiménez and Valéry.

As Stanton notes, the Eliotic voice does not wholly dismiss the Pellicerian: 'La otra voz no ha sido cancelada sino relativizada' (p. 40). In fact, the poem ends with a question that invites the return of 'poetas iluminados por una alegría solar': '¿Cuándo veremos de nuevo al sol?' ('Nocturno', 9).

Earlier, I drew an analogy between, on the one hand, the 'exaltación lírica' of Pellicer and Perse and, on the other, the 'arte de tesis' of 'Ética'; both are forms of action in the world, and a means of relating to the world. The analogy can be extended with reference to 'Nocturno'. Here the Eliotic form of a negating consciousness, which conflicts with Pellicer, has a close relation to the 'valor testimonial e histórico' that 'Ética' had also demanded. The negation of 'Nocturno', after all, hovers between a personal, emotional orientation and a sense of historical decline out in the world. Both 'valor testimonial e histórico' and the negation of 'Nocturno' are forms of consciousness, forms of awareness that militate against the plunge into feeling or belief that 'exaltación lírica' and an 'arte de tesis' require. The conflict can be reframed as a battle between connection with, or action in, the world, and an awareness that one is separate from the world; or between the creative impulse and the rational consciousness that impedes that impulse. Paz's use of Eliot as a negating consciousness thus draws Eliot closer to the Valéry that 'Ética' had so resisted, and so closer to the Contemporáneos. Eliot himself talked of 'the agony of *creation*, for a mind like Valéry's [...] the mind constantly mocks and dissuades, and urges that the creative activity is vain'.²⁴ Manguía had also observed 'una rebuscada esterilidad' in the work of the two authors (p. 7).

The analogies that I have drawn confirm that post-romantic tendency, which McLuhan identifies, to conflate the inner psychological realm with an outer, historical one. Thus the battle between 'exaltación lírica' and rational consciousness, artistic production and hindrance to that production, is also an outer battle between a meaningful history and a meaningless one. Later in Paz's career, this confusion between the historical and the personal allows meaning to be attached to the battle for poetic expression in such a way that the very fact of writing a poem successfully becomes, in itself, a triumph over historical circumstance. The aesthetic thus acquires a moral significance normally confined to historical actions. This moral equation of lyric

²⁴ 'Leçon de Valéry', 74.

expression and historical action partly explains why Paz is so ambivalent about the negating consciousness, that impediment to action, which he develops through his reading of Eliot. In 'Ética' it is dismissed as the 'obra escéptica y corrosiva' of the Contemporáneos, yet it is a constant awareness in his own poems which gives meaning to, even as it threatens, moments of 'exaltación'.

Although *The Hollow Men* and Manguía's introduction to 'El páramo' are obvious sources for 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada', Eliot is not the only influence. Xavier Villaurrutia, whose article of 1928 had promoted the *Nouvelle Revue Française* version of Eliot, wrote a series of 'Nocturnos', two of which *Barandal* published as a supplement to the December 1931 issue. Villaurrutia supplied Paz with both a title and a further model for a poetry of absences. Villaurrutia was himself a keen reader of Eliot's poems, and in a letter of 1935 to José Gorostiza he declared, 'He recaído en los poemas de T. S. Eliot como en una fría y conocida fiebre.'²⁵ Like *The Hollow Men*, his *Barandal* 'Nocturno eterno' lists a series of presences which are systematically voided:

o cuando de una boca que no existe
sale un grito inaudito
que nos echa a la cara su luz viva
y se apaga y nos deja una ciega sordera.²⁶

Villaurrutia does not locate these absences as the symptom of historical decline, however, in the manner of Paz's poem. His conclusion suggests a different perspective:

porque vida silencio piel y boca
y soledad recuerdo cielo y humo
nada son sino sombras de palabras
que nos salen al paso de la noche. (p. 7)

The world is only the shadow of the poet's medium, language. Villaurrutia takes a vision of absence that Paz's own 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada' entertains and uses it to explore the preoccupation with artistic form that the Contemporáneos found in Paul Valéry. 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada' shares this awareness of language, in spite of the polemic of 'Ética'. It is difficult to separate clearly the presence of Villaurrutia from the presence of Eliot in Paz's poem.

²⁵ Gorostiza, *Epistolario*, 327-8. Guillermo Sheridan (p. 228) describes the presence of 'un paisaje urbano opresivo, semejante a los de Eliot' in Villaurrutia's collection of 1926, *Reflejos*.

²⁶ *Barandal*, 2, 5 (diciembre 1931), p. 6.

The sense of vacancy and unreality in Villaurrutia's 'Nocturnos' has an obvious kinship with the *The Hollow Men* and also with 'Prufrock'. 'Dare' is a prominent verb in both of Eliot's poems, with the 'Eyes I dare not meet in dreams' of the one, and the "'Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"' of the other (*CPP*, 83 & 14). Villaurrutia expresses a similar tentativeness, a similar fear of confrontation:

dudo si responder
a la muda pregunta con un grito
por temor de saber que ya no existo (p. 6)

One needn't insist, however, on a direct influence of Eliot on Villaurrutia. The Mexican poet was well read in the French authors that had influenced Eliot, and doubts about the reality of self and world can be understood in more general terms as a natural consequence of nineteenth-century Idealism. The significance of the similarities between Eliot and Villaurrutia lies, for my study, in the way that this combined influence on some of Paz's early poems repositions the debate of 'Ética'. There, Paz criticizes the Contemporáneos for their 'obra escéptica y corrosiva', and proposes as an alternative (what, I have argued, was in fact two alternatives) an art with 'valor testimonial e histórico' and an 'arte de tesis'. Eliot seems aligned with Paz in this critique, and against the Contemporáneos, as one of the 'hombres completos, íntegros' who are willing to admit history and make assertions of belief. In 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada', however, Eliot is brought into the ambit of Villaurrutia precisely for an 'obra escéptica y corrosiva'. Although distinctions can be made between the two poets - Eliot brings a sense of historical decline that Villaurrutia's poems lack, while conversely the sense of unreality in Villaurrutia's work accentuates an aspect of Eliot that might otherwise have been unexploited by Paz - together they provide a poetry which negates the assertions of political and pseudo-religious belief that 'Ética' is directed towards. Paz's ambivalence towards this negation runs throughout his various comments on the Contemporáneos; he never fully accepts it. Yet he finds negation an inescapable half of a dialogue, the other half of which is his desire for assertion. His reading of Eliot is therefore not a stable aspect of his poetic project. It can be used both in conjunction with the Contemporáneos and in opposition to them.

The other of Paz's earliest poems to display the presence of Eliot is 'Desde el principio';²⁷ Stanton notes 'ecos lejanos' (p. 47). Both *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men* are evident in this poem with a number of images that marry physical drought to an emotional state: Paz refers to 'el aire funeral, en lloro estéril' and 'la aridez del sueño' ('Desde', 11). Manguía had noted of *The Waste Land*, elaborating rather, that 'durante todo el poema, delira el poeta de sed' (p. 13) and, indeed, in 'Desde el principio' the poet cries out 'qué sed' (p. 11). This image is answered in the final section of the poem with 'el reino de los surtidores aéreos' (p. 12), which recalls the various kingdoms of *The Hollow Men*.

As in 'Nocturno', the battle between abundance and creative sterility, or assertion and negation, summons echoes of Pellicer and Perse. Potentially Pellicerian or Persian coastal landscapes become hostile: 'Atravesando países de niebla / y costas duras, / mordidas por las aullantes olas'; '...mientras el viento desterrado grita sobre una roca' ('Desde', 12). Unlike 'Nocturno' however, where the world of 'alegría solar' was negated by the Eliotic voice, Paz here projects a sense of hostility into the landscape itself. This is a practice that he will develop further in a later use of Eliot, *Entre la piedra y la flor* (1941).

'Desde el principio' does not employ Eliot simply to negotiate a personal creative battle, however. As in 'Nocturno', a sense of exhaustion is placed within the historical perspective of a mythical reality that has now departed:

Huyendo, en el centro del Universo,
De donde huyeron los angeles.

While Stanton (p. 48) suggests that the use of the verb 'huir' in these lines has a direct antecedent in Rafael Alberti's *Sobre los ángeles* (1929), there is also a possible echo of 'El páramo' - 'las ninfas han huído' (p. 22). The gerund itself - 'Huyendo' - could recall the present participles at the opening of 'The Burial of the Dead', although both the Manguía and the Flores translations of *The Waste Land* employ present indicative for Eliot's more open syntax.²⁸

In spite of the references to *The Waste Land*, as with 'Nocturno', it is *The Hollow Men* that provides the closer model for the division into sections, and the

²⁷ *Cuadernos del Valle de México*, 1 (septiembre 1933), 11-13.

²⁸ Neither Manguía nor Flores publishes Eliot's English text alongside their translations and I have proposed that Paz's recollection of the time when he 'dared' to read *The Waste Land* in English refers to a date later than 1931.

lineation of 'Desde el principio'. Paz employs the first person plural of 'We are the hollow men':

Así caminamos los hombres,
lejos de la eternidad.²⁹

Again, the line break is employed to undercut the initial assertion. The syntax is appositional, the adjectival phrase placed separately from the main clause, rather than continuously with it. Although this is still distant from the fragmentary form of *The Waste Land*, appositional relation is already a movement towards the fragmentary; it places elements of discourse in proximity, and requires of the reader that they construct meaning that will connect those elements. It uses the line break to dramatize the construction of the relation – or in this case the lack of relation, the separation of the speaker from eternity. The use of the first person plural serves to generalize a personal state and so gives it a historical relevance; the reader is not simply confronted with the individual creative imagination, but the experience of a group or a society. The use of the first person plural continues with 'nuestros propios pensamientos' but it is then curiously abandoned for the third person of 'Hombre, lloroso hombre, desventurado hombre' (p. 12). This seems a clear echo of 'Y el hombre... Pobre... pobre!' in César Vallejo's 'Los heraldos negros' (1918).³⁰ It chimes in mood with the use of Eliot, but it enacts a sharp transition from a vision of historical extension to one of more intimate, pitying observation. The oddness of the transition suggests a poet, as one would expect at this stage of his career, still trading different influences that don't entirely cohere. It also suggests an emotional core in Paz's use of Eliot which is directed towards a sense of human abjection, but which cannot yet express that sense within a consistent vision. As his call for an 'arte de tesis' suggests, Paz was impatient for a vision that could mitigate, or at least comprehend, the sense of abjection that 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada' and 'Desde el principio' express. Anthony Stanton detects in the later poem 'la inquietud de hacer una poesía de dimensiones metafísicas', but argues that Paz 'tendrá que empaparse, poéticamente, de la experiencia religiosa de Quevedo para poder explorar con fortuna las zonas de hondura y angustia que aparecen aquí como zonas nombradas pero no habitadas de verdad' (p. 50). Like Villaurrutia in 'Nocturno',

²⁹ Eliot also employs the first person plural – 'We who were living are now dying' (CPP, 72) – in 'What the Thunder Said', the section of *The Waste Land* that is closest to Eliot's later poem.

³⁰ *Obra poética completa*, vol. 3 (Lima: Mosca Azul Editores, 1974), p. 11.

Quevedo is a figure who will appear alongside Eliot in Paz's work as the 1930s progress.

The tendency of these early poems, which is associated with Eliot and Villaurrutia, to deny effective vision is more successful than Paz's attempts to construct an explanation of, or metaphysic for, the world that he encounters. Although Eliot is barely a presence in Paz's first published book of poems, *Luna silvestre* (1933), this tendency towards negation, which I have described in 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada' and 'Desde el principio', is evident.

The very title of Paz's book is a surprising acknowledgement of a *modernista* rhetoric that 'Quizá asesine a un crepúsculo' of 'Juego' and the 'lunas estranguladas' of 'Desde el principio' (p. 12) had satirized. The first poem of the collection also unexpectedly recalls the 'poesía desnuda, mía para siempre' of Juan Ramón Jiménez, which had been such a talisman for the Contemporáneos:

Cómo volviste a ser, Poesía,
en la frontera exacta de la luz y la sombra,
cómo volviste a mí, Poesía,
tan casta en tu desnudez, vestida de pudores. (*OC13*, 43)³¹

Where Paz departs from Jiménez is in an attempt to locate his 'Poesía' physically, and, significantly, he locates it in states of between-ness: 'en la frontera exacta de la luz y la sombra', and in the previous stanza 'entre una estrella y otra'. Paz echoes the 'entre' from the final section of 'Los hombres huecos' which will become for him a talismanic meditation on disjunction.

Although there is no case for a direct influence of Eliot on *Luna silvestre*, as it can be argued for 'Nocturno' and 'Desde el principio', the theme of absence and negation, which I have related to Villaurrutia and Eliot, is prominent. An address to the moon proceeds,

Por el aire de ausencia de mi noche
conduces a los sueños, luna grácil. (*OC13*, 43)

An address to his lover also dwells on vacancy:

Mis brazos rodeando el círculo perfecto,

³¹ The poems of *Luna silvestre* which I have quoted from *OC13* are unaltered from their original appearance in 1933.

el hueco, lleno de memorias,
que me deja la ausencia de tu cuerpo. (OC13, 46)

There is a suggestion, as in the Eliot poems, that this sense of vacancy is the result of a historical process. Present dearth is set against past plenitude: '...expulsado de mis antiguos reinos' (OC13, 45); or 'Amor, quedan las voces agotadas, / el silencio seré de tu silencio' (OC13, 47).

In spite of their seemingly outmoded rhetoric, these poems are alive with the negation and absence that characterize poems which bear a stronger resemblance to Eliot. As Stanton describes *Luna silvestre*: 'el homenaje a la tradición es un acto de apropiación y un pequeño desafío expresado en lo mismos términos de la retórica tradicional' (p. 59). That 'pequeño desafío' provides a means of protesting the inadequacy of the rhetoric and beliefs that he has inherited. So far, however, Paz has not found a way beyond his inheritance; he has not found a satisfactory means of expressing the impulse that motivated his call for an 'arte de tesis', or that drew him towards the 'exaltación lírica' of Pellicer. He is still trapped within a negative way.

In an interview of 1972, Paz described Eliot's *Waste Land* admiringly as a poem of negation: 'Creo que el poema grandioso de Eliot, "The Waste Land", es el momento de duda y negación. Creo que es uno de los grandes poemas de nuestro siglo.'³² Yet Paz was ambivalent about the role of negation in art, particularly with reference to the Contemporáneos. Critical response to *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, the Eliot poems that Paz knew in the early 1930s, has also been ambivalent about the role that the negative plays. Ronald Bush, for example, relates *The Hollow Men* to Dante's *Vita nuova*, and sees portrayed in it a state of desolation that is one stage in a larger process, 'a condition that feels like the emptiness of death but may lead to the spiritual love' (Bush, 94). Frank Kermode borrows the term 'decreation' from Simone Weil and similarly reads *The Waste Land* as a necessary abnegation of self, an abstention from the human, thus false, measure which we habitually project onto the world.³³ Christopher Ricks, however, denies *The Hollow Men* this status: 'In their deprivation of affections and of affect, they have arrived at only a lethal travesty of spiritual mortification' (p. 221). The ambivalence of these responses reflects the nature of the experience. In itself a state of vacuity is distressing. It is only in its aftermath that the purgation becomes

³² 'La evolución poética de Paz', 8. 'Negación' has the double meaning of both 'negation' and 'denial'.

³³ 'A Babylonish Dialect', in Allen Tate, ed., *T. S. Eliot: the Man and his Work* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), pp. 234-5.

apparent as part of a larger pattern of spiritual progress. Eliot himself described religion as a flight from ‘the void’ that he found ‘in the middle of all human happiness and all human relations, and which there is only one thing to fill’.³⁴ I have argued that Paz in his early poems was attracted towards a poetry of negation represented by Villaurrutia and the Eliot of *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, yet at the same time in ‘Ética’ he vilifies the ‘obra escéptica y corrosiva’ of the Contemporáneos and tries to fill that void with an ‘arte de tesis’.

In September 1933, however, the same month that *Luna silvestre* was published, a Spanish translation appeared in *Cruz y Raya* of Martin Heidegger’s ‘What is Metaphysics?’, his seminal meditation on the positive value of the void. In his interview with Rita Guibert, Paz remembers the event:

Nos causó mucha impresión leer en español un texto de Heidegger, *¿Qué es la nada?*, traducido por Zubiri y publicado en *Cruz y Raya*, la revista de José Bergamín. (PC, 80)

Paz significantly misremembers the title of the translation, ‘¿Qué es la metafísica?’, in favour of the essay’s content – an interrogation of ‘the nothing’. Heidegger provides a positive valuation of the negative, or rather, the nothing, which helps to justify Paz’s reluctant use of Eliot and Villaurrutia.

The approach of ‘¿Qué es la metafísica?’ is highly amenable for a poet such as Paz in a post-romantic tradition of poetry which proposes human experience as the basis of knowledge. Metaphysics is, for Heidegger, not so much a speculation on what is out there but a question posed in a determinate here and now:

El preguntar metafísico tiene que ser totalitario y debe plantearse siempre desde la situación esencial en que se halla colocada la existencia interrogante. Nos preguntamos, *aquí y ahora, para nosotros*.³⁵

Questions of metaphysics thus become epistemological questions – not ‘What is it?’, but ‘What, and how, do I know?’. Paz’s own poems as his career progresses tend to reframe metaphysical questions in this way as epistemological ones.

³⁴ Letter dated ‘Shrove Tuesday, 1928 [1929?]’, quoted in John D. Margolis, *T. S. Eliot’s Intellectual Development: 1922-1939* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 142.

³⁵ *Cruz y Raya*, 6 (15 septiembre 1933), p. 86. Zubiri’s translation had appeared earlier in *Sur*, 5, (verano 1932), but Paz claims to have first come across it in *Cruz y Raya*. The original lecture had been delivered by Heidegger himself as recently as 1929, indicating the avidity of Hispanic letters for recent developments in continental philosophy.

As with the broadly experiential bias of Paz's and Eliot's poetry, Heidegger makes human emotion the gateway to knowledge: '*la angustia hace patente la nada*' (p. 98). Yet, as in Valéry, and as in Paz's early poems, human experience, and human knowledge, is mediated through language. In response to the question '¿Qué es la nada?':

Toda *respuesta* a esta pregunta resulta, desde un principio, imposible. Porque la respuesta se desenvolverá necesariamente en esta forma: la nada "es" esto o lo otro. *Tanto la pregunta como la respuesta* respecto a la nada son, pues, igualmente un *contrasentido*. (p. 91)

At one stage he even asks: '¿No caemos con todo esto en una vana disputa de palabras?' (p. 89).

Yet it is Heidegger's conception of the nothing as in itself something positive which is his most significant answer to the impasse in which Paz found himself:

La nada es la posibilitación de la patencia del ente, como tal ente, para la existencia humana. La nada no nos proporciona el contracepto del ente, sino que pertenece originariamente a la esencia del ser mismo. (p. 103)

The nothing is not viewed as being's contrary, but as its foundation, an integral part of being. The states of nullity and the moments of silence or incoherence that occur in *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men* can be read within this scheme not as symptoms of historical, social breakdown but as moments of access to a fundamental aspect of the human condition. Although Christopher Ricks denies any spiritual value in the nullity of *The Hollow Men*, he does argue that elsewhere in Eliot 'the void and the vacuum can be positive in their very negativity' and draws on 'looking into the heart of light, the silence' (CPP, 62) from 'The Burial of the Dead' as illustration (Ricks, 174).

I have talked of a negation in Paz's early work, and I am associating that negation with the 'nothing' of 'What is metaphysics?'. Heidegger, however, made a distinction between the two terms. Negation, as an action done to being has to be distinct from 'nothing', which is prior to being, and its foundation: '*la nada es más originaria que el no y que la negación*' (p. 93). The status of the negation that I have discussed therefore relates ambiguously to the nothing of Heidegger. Does negation provide a route to a foundational nothing, or is it confined to the being on which it acts? I think that in spite of his distinction, an argument can still be made for a relation between his positive nothing and the positive value that a religious *via negativa* places

on negation. Heidegger's rhetoric certainly carries a religious connotation which justifies the association: 'En la angustia hay un retro-ceder ante... que no es ciertamente un huir, sino una fascinada quietud' (p. 101). The 'obra corrosiva y escéptica' of the Contemporáneos thus acquires positive value as both a stage of a spiritual journey, and a means of access to the foundation of being. The fear of the negative that seems to underpin both Paz's attachment to the idea of an 'arte de tesis', and the imaginative plenitude of his Pellicerian poems becomes a necessary aspect of experience, as Pellicer's desire for 'una cosa desierta' had intimated.

Six months after the appearance of Heidegger's '¿Qué es la metafísica?', *Cruz y Raya* published a translation by A. Marichalar, a contributor to *The Criterion*, of Eliot's 'Lancelot Andrewes'. It was the first of Eliot's prose to appear in Spanish. Although Paz never mentioned the translation, it seems likely, given the fact that both he and other Mexican writers were reading *Cruz y Raya* at this time, that it would have been noticed and discussed. The essay provides a contradictory intervention in the debate between purism, negation, and belief - *Cruz y Raya* was subtitled *Revista de afirmación y negación* - that is so important for the early Paz.

Marichalar describes *The Waste Land*, and by implication the pre-conversion *Hollow Men* also, as one stage of a process through negation to affirmation: 'No era tierra de promisión la acre paramera de Eliot; era, sí, campo raso donde edificarse':

Cuando, el año 1922, Eliot publica su gran poema *The Waste Land*, es un agnóstico que clama, con árido acento, la amargura de páramos desollados. Mas el yermo conduce a un paraíso. Poco después, Eliot empieza a descubrir el gozo en el Cristianismo. Su actitud clásica le acerca - fatalmente - a Roma. Hoy, Eliot es un converso de la Iglesia Anglicana.³⁶

It is difficult to know quite how Paz would have regarded this information. In spite of the strain of religious rhetoric that characterizes his prose, he never discovered 'el gozo en el Cristianismo'. Nevertheless, Eliot's willingness to expound beyond purely aesthetic problems must have appealed. Slightly misrepresenting Eliot, who never accepted that poetry *had* replaced religion, only that figures such as Matthew Arnold and I. A. Richards believed that it could, Marichalar provides an Eliot to counter Gorostiza's assertion that 'El arte por el arte es filosóficamente correcta': 'Eliot acepta que la poesía ha llegado a sustituir a la religión, pero no que pueda salvarnos' (p. 64).

³⁶ 'Lancelot Andrews' [sic], *Cruz y Raya*, 12 (marzo 1934), p. 62.

Eliot doesn't talk about the need for belief simply in poems, but in society as a whole; his concern is truly political:

Lo que aquí importa es subrayar que, ya en 1930, este hijo de su siglo creía que la única esperanza del mundo había de estar en un renacimiento religioso. *El mundo*, según Eliot, *está tratando de alcanzar una mentalidad civilizada que no sea cristiana. El experimento fracasará.* (p. 62)

Paz had called in 'Ética' for belief and here he has it. Eliot's position is provocative in a country which had tightened restrictions on the Catholic church after the *Cristero* revolts of the peasantry in the 1920s, and which had seen one of its presidents, Álvaro Obregón, murdered by a Catholic militant in 1928. Yet Paz was never an orthodox member of the Mexican left, and in his political memoir, *Itinerario*, he justifies the inconsistencies of his own generation with reference to the faith of *Cruz y Raya*'s editor: 'si el católico Bergamín proclamaba su adhesión a la revolución sin renunciar a la cruz, ¿cómo no perdonar nuestras contradicciones?'.³⁷

Although Marichalar presents 'Lancelot Andrewes' as an example of post-conversion Eliot, and thus, at least partially, as a justification for an 'arte de tesis', the essay itself provides a focus for discussion which shares much with the *artepuristas*. Like Valéry, Andrewes concedes a generative power to language:

Andrews toma una palabra y deriva el mundo de ella, estrujando, más y más, la palabra hasta hacerla exprimir el pleno jugo de su significado hasta un grado insospechable. Y en este proceso se ejercitan las mencionadas cualidades de precisión y de orden. (p. 76)³⁸

His historical period is viewed from the later perspective of the avant-garde as 'una época llena de aventuras y experimentos para el lenguaje' (p. 81); and his method is also described as experimental, even ludic:

No duda, para hacernos llegar al sentido de una palabra, no vacila en martillarla, doblegarla y hasta jugar con ella. (p. 82)

Yet Eliot also sees a connection between the aesthetic, 'purist' and the ethical, or social:

³⁷ *Itinerario* (México: FCE, 1993; Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1994), p. 49.

³⁸ Marichalar's translation of 'ordonnance' as 'orden' adds an ethical, social connotation to Eliot's specifically technical observation.

Su pasión por el orden, dentro de la religión, se manifiesta en su pasión por el orden dentro de la prosa. (p. 74)

The boundaries between the realm of belief and the realm of the aesthetic, which 'Ética' had insisted upon maintaining, are deliberately blurred by a constant analogy between the two. Eliot finds a moral value in Andrewes's art but also an aesthetic in his dogma:

El obispo Andrews trató, como indiqué antes, de ceñirse, en sus sermones, a la elucidación de aquello que consideraba esencial en el dogma; él mismo dijo que durante dieciséis años no había aludido jamás al tema de la Predestinación sobre el cual fijaban los puritanos (siguiendo a sus hermanos del continente) atención tan grande. Para él la Encarnación era un dogma esencial, esto nos permite comparar diecisiete desenvolvimientos diferentes de la misma idea. (p. 75)

Incarnation is central to Eliot's later *Four Quartets*, but it is also a guiding metaphor of symbolist aesthetics – words as the concrete embodiment of a spiritualized meaning or suggestion. It provides the basis of Mallarmé's retort to Edgar Degas that 'ce n'est point avec des idées, mon cher Degas, que l'on fait des vers. C'est avec des *mots*', and of Ezra Pound's 'Go in fear of abstractions' that he famously applied to the 'dim lands of peace' in Ford Madox Ford's 'On a Marsh Road: Winter Nightfall'.³⁹ It surfaces in Jiménez, Valéry, and the Contemporáneos as an awareness of the word as the embodiment of meaning, but also as a material, or plastic, presence in itself, hence as an occlusion of meaning. I have described Incarnation as a metaphor for the symbolists rather than as a theme because its application is mobile. Hence, as I have argued in Villaurrutia, and with Davie and Kenner's contrast between Eliot (language-based) and Pound (objective or world-based), a confusion arises as to whether the concrete element of experience is the world that the word describes or the word itself.

'Ética' had tried to keep these two realms separate, but the two magazines that Paz ran with his friends, *Barandal* then *Cuadernos del Valle de México*, were themselves a curious blend of aesthetic sophistication and political stridency. They published a letter from Valéry to Juan Ramón Jiménez, the two icons of *artepurismo*, as well as a translation of the dialogue between Virag and Bloom in Chapter 15 of

³⁹ The anecdote is recounted by Valéry in 'Poésie et pensée abstraite' (1939) (*Oeuvres*, vol. 1, 1324); 'Don't use such an expression as 'dim land [*sic*] of peace'. It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realizing that the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol', Ezra Pound, 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste' (1913), repr. in *Imagist Poetry* (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 131.

Ulysses.⁴⁰ Yet at the same time they could conclude that while the Soviet Union ‘se está construyendo una nueva realidad’, the work of a writer such as Marcel Proust was fettered by a moribund capitalism:

¡He aquí a Marcel Proust, tan inteligente, y que, sin embargo, no pudo hacer otra cosa que recordar el pasado, sin ánimos para el porvenir, porque sus mejores fuerzas no hallaron cómo expresarse!⁴¹

Paz’s generation had great difficulty marrying their aesthetic interests with their beliefs, as Eliot, for example, had managed to find in the word-play of Lancelot Andrewes one of the great moments of the Anglican church. It was the visit of Rafael Alberti with his wife on a lecture tour to Mexico with El Socorro Rojo Internacional in 1934 which suggested a possible marriage of the two realms.

For Paz’s generation, Alberti had both strong political and poetic credentials. In an addition to ‘Rafael Alberti, visto y entrevistado’ (1984) of 1990, Paz recalls that ‘era uno de nuestros poetas favoritos y cuya reciente adhesión al comunismo nos había entusiasmado’ (*AIP*, 38). After his talks, the young Mexicans would meet up with Alberti and read him their own poems. Paz recalls one of these occasions in *Solo a dos voces*:

Cuando yo le enseñé mis poemas a Alberti, él me dijo: “Bueno, esto no es poesía social...” (al contrario, era una poesía intimista – una palabra horrible ésta, intimista, pero eso era: intimista), “no es una poesía revolucionaria en el sentido político – dijo Alberti –, pero Octavio es el único poeta revolucionario entre todos ustedes, porque es el único en el cual hay una tentativa por transformar el lenguaje”. Y estas frases de Alberti me impresionaron mucho. (p. 61)

Alberti unexpectedly validated the Contemporáneos stance - ‘El arte es revolucionario por sí mismo y en sí mismo’ -⁴² which ‘Ética’ had been directed so vigorously against. Like Eliot in ‘Lancelot Andrewes’, the realms of the aesthetic and of belief are viewed as analogous. Paz gives different versions of Alberti’s advice. In an interview with Héctor Tajonar, he recalls, ‘la poesía – dijo – “está hecha de lenguaje y en esos poemas había el comienzo de un lenguaje”’;⁴³ while in his essay on Alberti the comment is: “Tú te propones explorar un territorio desconocido – tu propia intimidad – y no pasearte por

⁴⁰ *Barandal*, 4 (noviembre 1931), 22; *Cuadernos del Valle de México*, 2 (enero 1934), 18-25.

⁴¹ Enrique Ramírez y Ramírez, ‘Apuntes para un ensayo sobre el significado universal de la Unión Soviética’, *Cuadernos del Valle de México*, 1, (septiembre 1933), pp. 5 & 7.

⁴² *Contemporáneos*, 23, (abril 1930), pp. 79-80.

⁴³ ‘Con Octavio Paz y España como tema’, *Siempre*, 1246 (11 mayo 1977), p. 30.

parajes públicos en donde no hay nada que descubrir” (*AIP*, 35). Whether the advice is to look after the language, or to look to his own self, it is directed towards the aspects of poetry that ‘Ética’ had resisted. There, a revolutionary language had been reduced to ‘la sustitución de una retórica por otra’, and a preoccupation with the self the work of ‘el hombre individualista, estrechamente hombre, sin sentido religioso’ (*PL*, 114 & 115).

Alberti suggested to Paz that his political commitment was not incompatible with the poems that he was reading, and imitating. Paz notes that at the same time as advocating a politically committed art, Alberti himself was writing ‘Dos oraciones a la virgen’ (*AIP*, 33). Alberti and his wife ‘se sentían incómodos entre los intelectuales revolucionarios mexicanos [...] Era natural que les pareciesen un poco arcaicos, rústicos y estrechamente dogmáticos’ (*AIP*, 35). He offered Paz a crucial justification of the poems that he was writing at the time, and an unexpected rejoinder to the dogmatic attitude of ‘Ética’ towards ‘artepurismo’. He did not resolve the conflict, however, and as Paz recalls: ‘En esos años comencé a vivir un conflicto que se agravaría más y más con el tiempo: la contraposición entre mis ideas políticas y mis convicciones estéticas y poéticas’ (*It*, 29).

In ‘Ética del artista’, Paz had attempted to counter what he viewed as a lack of political and religious commitment in the work of the Contemporáneos, which he defined loosely as ‘artepurista’. His poems, as has been noted by a number of critics, then show a much greater sympathy for the Contemporáneos than ‘Ética’ would imply. Nevertheless, his prose and poetic thinking are not antithetical. The opposition between the void that in ‘Ética’ he found in the ‘obra escéptica’ of the Contemporáneos, and that he hoped to fill with an ‘arte de tesis’ is played out in his poems as a battle between a Pellicerian, or Persian, ludic delight in the world, and a negation of that ‘exaltación lírica’. In the poems, however, Paz is not moving from negation to assertion, but in reverse, and it is Eliot in company with Villaurrutia who helps him explore that vision of meaninglessness. A number of events in 1933 and 1934 then complicate this picture for Paz. He pursues the negative way of Eliot and Villaurrutia reluctantly, but Heidegger’s ‘What is Metaphysics?’ demonstrates that an exploration of the void, what lies prior to assertion, can have value in itself. Then six months later ‘Lancelot Andrewes’ appears in *Cruz y Raya*. Assuming that Paz did read, or at least know of it, Eliot’s essay confirms *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men* as poems of negation in a process towards assertion, but also offers a form of assertion – orthodox Christian belief – that troubles the indiscriminate call for an ‘arte de tesis’ in ‘Ética’ (although, as I have

argued, I think it is possible to exaggerate the problems that Eliot's Christian belief would have caused for Paz). More importantly, 'Lancelot Andrewes' demonstrates that a move into belief does not mean jettisoning the aesthetic awareness of symbolism. The analogy that Eliot pursues between the aesthetic and a realm of belief is a characteristic of the movement, and one that 'Ética' had resisted by trying to separate 'artepurismo' from an 'arte de tesis'. Alberti's visit then confirms the value of this analogy when, from an unimpeachable political position, yet in terms that a member of the Contemporáneos could have used, Alberti advises Paz that a revolutionary art must be revolutionary *as* art.

Chapter Five

Two Excursions

The years between Alberti's visit to México in 1934 and the founding of the magazine *Taller* (1938) were active ones for Paz. His poetic output was varied, from a gesture of support for the Republican troops in the Spanish Civil War, *¡No pasarán!* (1936), to a series of neo-baroque sonnets (1937), and his first major erotic poems: *Raíz del hombre* (1937) and *Bajo tu clara sombra* (1937). A number of works that did not receive publication until a later date were also composed during this period, the most significant for the relationship between Paz and Eliot being *Entre la piedra y la flor* (1941). Paz continues to engage Eliot in questions about the role of belief in poems, a debate which is configured within his developing relationship with the *Contemporáneos*.

¡No pasarán! was a direct response to the outbreak of civil war in Spain. As such it answered the call of 'Ética del artista' for a poetry with historical relevance that displayed commitment to a specific belief. Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano, who had edited *Contemporáneos* and was perhaps the main object of attack in 'Ética', compared Paz's new poem under the pseudonym Marcial Rojas to Pablo Neruda's 'Galope muerto' in an article provocatively titled 'Poesía y retórica':

En el primero [*¡No pasarán!*], no hay más que un superficial dramatismo que se obtiene con palabras como: amargamente, desgarrado, febriles, prisioneros, y en el segundo ['Galope muerto'] hay un real dramatismo de fondo y de concepto de algo que va naciendo y que antes no existía 'como mares poblándose'.¹

Alberti had praised Paz's poems for their revolutionary language rather than for their commitment to a politically revolutionary cause, thus substantiating Ortiz de Montellano's earlier assertion that 'el arte es revolucionario por sí mismo y en sí mismo'. *¡No pasaran!* indicates that Paz was not satisfied with this advice. He reverses the analogy on which it depends and ties the form of Neruda's 'Galope muerto', an experimental poem that was 'revolucionario por sí mismo', to a definite cause. The impulse that Paz expressed in 'Ética del artista' to embrace 'motivos' that could be 'políticos', 'religiosos' or 'simplemente doctrinarios', and which I have compared to

¹ *Letras de México*, 1 (15 enero 1937), p. 2.

Eliot's own statements on belief, is still active, even though his earliest poems that are closest to Eliot work to negate that impulse.

Although the need to express a view of the world was a constant in Paz's career, he seems to have accepted Ortiz de Montellano's criticism of *¡No pasarán!* as it does not appear in the various editions of *Libertad bajo palabra*, in which the poems of this period were later collected. It was Paz's next collection of poems, *Raíz del hombre* (1937), that he described as 'mi nacimiento poético' (OC13, 28). It was reviewed sympathetically in *Letras de México* a fortnight after the Ortiz de Montellano review by another member of the Contemporáneos, Jorge Cuesta, who enthused that:

Una inteligencia y una pasión tan raras y tan sensibles como las de este joven escritor, son de las que saben estar penetrantemente pendientes de lo que el porvenir reclama.²

Raíz del hombre displayed no explicit political intention but traced an erotic relationship through sixteen poems of moderate extension. Nevertheless, Cuesta concluded that the question of belief, or a 'metafísica' as he called it, impinged upon these poems:

La nota más característica de su poesía es una desesperación, que no tardará en precisarse en una metafísica. (p. 9)

Paz had in fact worked out a sort of belief for *Raíz del hombre*, which he later classed doubtfully as

una suerte de vaga teoría de la sexualidad en la que el abrazo carnal era una repetición instantánea y en miniatura del proceso cósmico [...] La caída erótica era un ascenso, el regreso a un fin que era un principio: noche de amor, noche de resurrecciones. (OC13, 28)

In 'La religión solar de D. H. Lawrence' (1990), he credits Lawrence along with Novalis as sources for 'la tonalidad religiosa de esta visión erótica' (ALP, 12).³ Yet this vision

² 'Raíz del hombre, Octavio Paz', *Letras de México*, 2 (1 febrero 1937), p. 9.

³ Two articles had appeared in *Contemporáneos* on Lawrence: one an obituary by Enrique Manguía, 'D. H. Lawrence (1886-1930)', *Contemporáneos*, 23 (abril 1930), 81-6; and the other an article by John Gould Fletcher, translated by Manguía, 'La poesía de D. H. Lawrence', *Contemporáneos*, 18 (noviembre 1929), 322-28. Paz himself wrote a review of Lawrence's *The Woman Who Rode Away*, in which he praised Lawrence for being a writer with a spiritual 'message': 'Nada más lejos de Lawrence – ese predicador de la sensualidad, como lo llama Malraux –, que el arte sensual, que se complace en sí mismo y que no tiende sino a la satisfacción de un rigor formal, puramente estético. Para Lawrence la obra de arte es un verdadero alimento espiritual', 'Lawrence en español' (1940) (PL, 177). In spite of his frequent hostility, Eliot himself praised Lawrence in similar terms: 'Lawrence lived all his life, I should imagine, on the spiritual level; no man was less a sensualist. Against the living death of modern material

also owed a debt to a poet closer to home and, paradoxically, closer to Eliot – Pablo Neruda. Cuesta’s review noted the presence of Neruda in *Raíz del hombre* along with the Mexican poets Ramón López Velarde, Carlos Pellicer, and Xavier Villaurrutia (p. 9). Neruda’s ‘Arte poética’ and ‘Diurno doliente’ had appeared in *Contemporáneos* in 1931, but it was the collection into which these poems were gathered, *Residencia en la tierra*, which Paz described as ‘un libro que me sacudió hondamente cuando lo leí por primera vez (tenía veintidós años)’ (OC3, 26).⁴ The sense of shock that Paz describes on reading Neruda’s *Residencia* echoes his recollection of reading *The Waste Land*. This is not coincidental. Both poems replaced expected norms of syntactic continuity with a more open, disjunctive form. Neruda’s *Residencia en la tierra* completed the great triad of the Spanish American *vanguardia*, along with César Vallejo’s *Trilce* (1922) and Vicente Huidobro’s *Altazor* (1931). The young Paz displayed little interest in these latter two poems, although a part of *Altazor* was published in *Contemporáneos*.⁵ Paz’s sense of a *vanguardia* was formed, as I have argued, not so much by a native Spanish American tradition as by a selective reading of *Contemporáneos* – his triad was Eliot, Perse, and now Neruda.

Both *The Waste Land* and *Residencia en la tierra* were testimony to periods of emotional crisis for their respective authors. Robert Pring-Mill describes Neruda’s time in the East, during which he wrote many of the poems that appear in the first part of *Residencia*, as ‘a period of virtually total spiritual bleakness – the blackest of his life’.⁶ His reading of Eliot informs ‘Caballero solo’, composed in Colombo in 1929, which provides a direct version of ‘the typist home at teatime’ from ‘The Fire Sermon’ (CPP, 68):

El pequeño empleado, después de mucho,
después del tedio semanal, y las novelas leídas de noche en cama,
ha definitivamente seducido a su vecina,
y la lleva a los miserables cinematógrafos
donde los héroes son potros o príncipes apasionados,

civilization he spoke again and again, and even if these dead could speak, what he said is unanswerable’, *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), p. 60.

⁴ The first edition of *Residencia en la tierra. 1925-1931* appeared in Santiago, Chile, in 1933. A later edition in two parts, which included further poems written 1931-1935, was published by *Cruz y Raya* in Madrid in 1935. Given that Paz was twenty-two in 1936, and that the *Residencia* published by *Cruz y Raya* was the more readily available of the two editions, one can assume that he was reading the two-part version of Neruda’s work.

⁵ “‘Altazor’ (fragmento)”, *Contemporáneos*, 40-41 (septiembre-octubre 1931), 152-56. In an interview of 1973 Paz describes meeting Vicente Huidobro briefly in Spain during the Civil War and confesses: ‘Mucho después lo leí con cuidado y amor. Demasiado tarde’ (*Solo*, 65).

⁶ ‘Introduction’ to *Pablo Neruda: A Basic Anthology* (Oxford: Dolphin, 1975), p. xxi.

y acaricia sus piernas llenas de dulce vello
con sus ardientes y húmedas manos que huelen a cigarillo.⁷

Neruda's passage, like its equivalent in Eliot, either dramatizes a speaker suffering from a feeling of overwhelming disgust, or it exercises a snobbery that is itself distasteful, depending on one's point of view. Normally blameless activities, like reading in bed or going to the cinema, have become curiously sordid – as Ian Hamilton says of the Eliot, 'the meal is eaten out of tins (why should *that* be so awful?...)'.⁸ Hamilton's objection to the passage in Eliot rests upon an accusation of frigidity:

The most heroic seduction would stand little chance against the arms-length vocabulary which Eliot employs here: 'endeavours', 'encounters', 'requires', 'assaults', and so on – this is refrigerating language, prissily dignified, fastidiously embarrassed. (pp. 108-9)

It is here that Neruda departs from his source. Instead of the arms-length 'engage her in caresses' he chooses the direct 'acaricia'. Neruda registers the physical sensations of both the man and the woman – the feeling of 'dulce vello' for the one, and of 'ardientes y húmedas manos' for the other, as well as the smell of cigarette smoke. The passage is far from a celebration of the erotic, but Neruda is clearly drawn to a sensual realization of the scene that is alien to *The Waste Land*. Paz himself made this distinction in an interview of 1973:

En Neruda, tan alejado de Eliot, hay [...] ciertos ecos. Hablo del Neruda de *Residencia en la tierra* y pienso concretamente en "Caballero solo" y en el fragmento erótico de la secretaria y el joven empleado en *The Waste Land*. Pero el erotismo de Eliot es muy poco erótico y la imagen que nos da del amor físico es sórdida. Neruda es verdadera y poderosamente sexual. Ése es uno de los polos positivos de su poesía: la energía, la irradiación erótica. (PC, 23)⁹

Neruda's route out of *The Waste Land* begins here, and it is a route that the Paz of *Raíz del hombre* is tempted to follow.

⁷ *Obras completas*, vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1967), p. 198.

⁸ 'The Waste Land', in *Eliot in Perspective: A Symposium*, ed. by Graham Martin (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 108. The 'piernas llenas de dulce vello' of the Neruda may echo a sexually charged, in part since it is bracketed, moment in 'Prufrock': '(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)' (CPP, 15).

⁹ Paz's early response to the erotic life in Eliot's poem may have been given a harsh turn by a misreading of the 'typist home at teatime' passage. In the first edition of *El arco y la lira* (México/Buenos Aires: FCE, 1956) he describes 'la empleada, violada por un petimetre' (p. 75). In the second edition (México: FCE, 1967) 'violada' has been revised as 'poseída' (p. 77).

Saúl Yurkievich describes Neruda's conception of the world as erotic in the broadest sense: 'La visión de Neruda es primordialmente erótica, siempre tiende a establecer con todo lo que concibe una relación corporal, carnal, sexual.'¹⁰ *The Waste Land* had suggested an analogy between a personal, sexual crisis and an inability to find relation in the world at large. Neruda accepts Eliot's analogy but reverses its import by expanding an active sexual desire into the world. Such an eroticized vision, which seeks 'una relación corporal' with its surroundings, is a material one, and it is in the 'Tres cantos materiales' at the end of *Residencia en la tierra* that Neruda finds some escape from the 'aislamiento que lo desampara y lo anonada' (Yurkievich, 199) in the earlier parts of the book. He finds satisfaction in a sensual relation to the physical world: 'Y ando entre húmedas fibras arrancadas / al vivo ser de substancia y silencio.'¹¹

In a contemporary review titled 'Pablo Neruda o el amor de la materia', María Zambrano praised the vision of the *Tres cantos materiales* as an alternative to *poesía pura*, which 'narcisista, llega a reflejarse a sí misma', and poems of a Platonic inheritance, which proceeded from 'un afán de sobrepasar el aspecto primero de las cosas para buscar su trasunto poético *detrás*'.¹² Neruda's poems remained attached to

amor, terrible amor de la materia, que acaba en ser amor de entrañas, de la oscura interioridad del mundo. Sobre la superficie del mundo están las formas y la luz que las define, mientras la materia gime bajo ella. (p. 38)

Zambrano's discussion, which adopts Neruda's own metaphor of a journey inward towards the material – 'entrando oscurecidos corredores, / llegando a tu materia misteriosa' (Neruda, 244) – is no less dualistic than the Platonism that it would replace, relying on an opposition between a surface world and an interior material one. Like Hillis Miller with his concept of 'immanence', Zambrano offers an alternative that is based upon the philosophy it aims to replace.

Paz, who had been presented with José Bergamín's separate edition of the *Tres cantos materiales* by Rafael Alberti (*ALP*, 33-4), must have been particularly aware of the response to *The Waste Land* that they contained. In the prose pieces of *Vigilias* which he was composing at the time, and which Enrico Mario Santí describes as 'un

¹⁰ *Fundadores de la nueva poesía latinoamericana*, 2nd edn (Barcelona: Barral Editores, 1973), p. 194.

¹¹ 'Entrada a la madera', Neruda, 233.

¹² *Hora de España*, 23 (noviembre 1938), pp. 35 & 37. Neruda had himself launched an attack on the purists in 'Sobre una poesía sin pureza' (1935).

compendio de los temas del joven poeta' (PL, 24), he conflates the 'detrás' of Platonism with the journey inward that Zambrano had adopted from Neruda:

Sólo la poesía, oscura y arrebatada, hierre en el universo y en su secreto; en su oscuridad subterránea, en su luz de sobrecielo, en su adivinación o videncia el mundo nos entrega sus formas y lo que alienta detrás de ellas. (PL, 65)

Paz's readiness to employ a Platonic vocabulary, and the attendant faith this implies in the worth of metaphysical system, indicate a significant difference from Neruda. Zambrano's attempt to excise Platonism from Neruda's vision picks up on a hostility towards intellectual systems in the *Tres cantos materiales* which is expressed in the declaration that opens 'Entrada a la madera' - 'Con mi razón apenas, con mis dedos...' (Neruda, 233). In a letter to Héctor Eandi of 24 April 1929, Neruda made this anti-intellectualism explicit as he explained the distance between himself and Jorge Luis Borges:

Tengo hasta cierto desprecio por la cultura, como interpretación de las cosas, me parece mejor un conocimiento sin antecedentes, una absorción física del mundo, a pesar y en contra de nosotros. La historia, los problemas 'del conocimiento', como los llaman, me parecen despojados de dimensión. Cuántos de ellos llenarían el vacío? Cada vez veo menos ideas en torno mío, y más cuerpos, sol y sudor.¹³

Neruda's materialism simply dismisses out of hand some of the major preoccupations of Paz's poetry. 'La historia' is never far from Paz's discussion of Eliot, and 'los problemas del "conocimiento"' are central to both Eliot and writers such as Villaurrutia, Valéry and Heidegger with which he is associated. I have discussed these problems in relation to the 'conciencia' that is the bequest of late-modernista poets, such as Ramón López Velarde, and *poesía pura*. Neruda's 'conocimiento sin antecedentes' pre-empt such an awareness, and relies upon a relation with the physical world to fill the void. Paz was more sceptical about the capacities of a materialist philosophy, and was attracted to the systems of 'conocimiento' that had arisen from an awareness of man as separate from creation.

The ninth poem of *Raíz del hombre* gives an indication of the limited extent to which Paz was willing to adopt Neruda's erotic, materialist answer to *The Waste Land*. As in Neruda, the speaker's relation to a woman is presented as an analogy for relation

¹³ Pablo Neruda, Héctor Eandi: *Correspondencia durante 'Residencia en la tierra'*, ed. by Margarita Aguirre (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1980), p. 46.

to the world at large, and as in Neruda that relation is initially conceived in terms of physical sensation:

Un tacto luminoso
me crece de los ojos;
reorro superficies
cautivo de las formas.¹⁴

The physical sensation of ‘tacto’ is disembodied, however, by the second line which qualifies it as a metaphorical ‘touch’ related to the sense of sight. Physical contact has been subordinated to observation, which implies a speaker separate from the world that he observes. Into this separation the Platonic language of ‘los problemas del “conocimiento”’ issues – the speaker cannot move beyond surface; he is captive to forms. The Nerudan model, as Zambrano describes it, would move beyond this world of surface appearance to a sensual relation with an inner material core, but what Paz finds as he arrives at a Nerudan ‘raíces’ is also a Heideggerian ‘nada’:

Desde las formas bajo a tus raíces,
desde las proporciones a la nada. (*AOM*, 74)

Beyond forms and proportions there is not an inner core of materiality but nothing. The very fact that Paz should bring Heidegger, a constructor of a system of ‘conocimiento’, into contact with Neruda demonstrates Paz’s distance from the fundamental anti-intellectualism of Neruda. For Paz there is always structure beyond physical sensation:

...palpando mortal carne
y oscuras relaciones. (*AOM*, 74)

He ultimately accepts that his relationship to his lover involves placing an interpretive grid upon her, an act of understanding, rather than of merging. It is even suggested that such presence as she has results from the illumination that his gaze bestows upon her:

Te sitio en proporciones, en medidas,
encadenó tu ser en mis miradas,

¹⁴ *A la orilla del mundo y Primer día, Bajo tu clara sombra, Raíz del hombre, Noche de resurrecciones* (México: Compañía Editora y Librería ARS, 1942), p. 73. *Raíz del hombre* first appeared in 1937. Since it is unavailable in Britain and the copy at the Biblioteca Nacional de México had gone missing when I visited, I have referred to the slightly later edition published in 1942. While it is not an exact record of his work in the mid-1930s, it nevertheless indicates his development in this early period before he travelled to the United States at the end of 1943.

con lazos invisibles,
te ilumino, te escucho. (AOM, 75)

Neruda's materialism was not assimilable to the kinds of awareness that Paz had already developed in his poetry and his prose. Neruda depended on a merging of the self with the world around it. As Saúl Yurkievich describes it, 'Naturaliza sus manifestaciones personales y antropomorfiza la naturaleza, como si entre creador y criatura existiese la total identidad' (p. 171). This sense of identity between poet and world had been expressed by St.-John Perse and then Carlos Pellicer, and had greatly attracted Paz, as the Neruda of *Residencia en la tierra*, and in particular of the *Tres cantos materiales*, was clearly attractive. The experience of merging with nature, of being a part of the world, permits a great flow of lyric effusion in Neruda – he seems to imitate the natural processes that he describes. Paz later described him as 'hombre de pocas ideas y gobernado por pasiones a un tiempo reconcentradas y oceánicas'.¹⁵ In my interview with Homero Aridjis, he placed Neruda in the line of 'exaltación lírica', of which Perse was such an important member, declaring that this tradition 'encontró su sepultura en Neruda'. As I have argued, Paz was drawn to this tradition, but worked it in counterpoint to an Eliotic 'conciencia' that is twinned with Villaurrutia, and has Valéry also as an antecedent. In an interview in *Unomásuno* of 1983, Paz recalled that 'Xavier Villaurrutia reprochaba la *facilidad* con que estaba escrita la poesía de Neruda'.¹⁶ The tradition of 'conciencia' stressed not man's identity with but his separateness from nature. Paz's early poems are preoccupied with this sense of excision from the world, and with 'los problemas "del conocimiento"', as his enthusiasm for Heidegger demonstrates. He was too involved in these questions to adopt Neruda's materialist answer to *The Waste Land*.

Paz's commitment to 'los problemas del "conocimiento"', and his association of Eliot with this commitment is evident in 'Monólogo', one of the sonnets that he wrote around the same time as *Raíz del hombre* and which was collected in *Primer día* in 1942:

Bajo las rotas columnas
entre la nada y el sueño,

¹⁵ *Sombras de obras* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1983), pp. 51-2.

¹⁶ 'Neruda veía la realidad de un modo fantástico y maravilloso: tenía los ojos de sonámbulo', *Unomásuno*, 21 septiembre 1983, p. 15.

cruzan mis horas insomnes
las sílabas de tu nombre.

Tu largo pelo rojizo,
relámpago del verano,
vibra con dulce violencia
en la espalda de la noche.

Corriente oscura del sueño
que mana entre las ruinas
y te construye de nada:
húmeda costa nocturna
donde se tiende y golpea
un mar sonámbulo, ciego. (AOM, 15)¹⁷

The starting point of this poem is Antonio Machado's 'Sobre la tierra amarga, / caminos tiene el sueño...', which Paz mirrors rhythmically and syntactically. Machado argues that man is confined to a dream world, with reality reduced to 'juguetes melancólicos'.¹⁸ Paz at first resists this solipsistic conclusion, and the second stanza constructs the presence of a lover; but then the final stanza confirms his isolation – the image that he constructs of his lover is itself blind; it cannot reciprocate. The poem also contains echoes of Eliot and Heidegger. The 'rotas columnas' recall *The Hollow Men*, and place the exercise in epistemology within a historical scheme – this situation is not perennial so much as the result of a specific decline in civilization. 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada' similarly used the image of ruins to add a historical dimension to the more purely epistemological concern of Villaurrutia's 'Nocturno eterno'. The poem also uses the 'entre' of *The Hollow Men* in its 'entre la nada y el sueño'. Paz employs Eliot's (and before him Valéry's and Shakespeare's) image of discontinuity to structure the metaphysic upon which the poem turns – a solipsistic 'sueño' faced by nothing. This placing of the nothing opposite the 'sueño' of the poet involves a misreading of Heidegger, for whom the nothing was not separable from being, but an integral part of it - 'La nada no es ya este vago e impreciso *enfrente del ente*, sino que se nos descubre como *perteneciendo al ser mismo del ente*' (p. 110). Paz's use of Eliot to misread Heidegger in this way, to spatialize, or structure, what Heidegger views as integral, confirms Paz's temperamental distance from the vision of Neruda, which stresses

¹⁷ An early version of *Primer día* was published as 'Sonetos' in *Taller Poético*, 3 (marzo 1937), 33-38. Although 'Bajo las rotas columnas...' did not appear in this early collection, it is gathered in *OC13* with poems written during 1935-1936.

¹⁸ *Poesías completas* (Madrid: Austral, 2000), p. 104.

fluidity or merging and aims to pre-empt metaphysics with physical contact. Paz accepted the vision of disjunction between man and world, which he found in Eliot and Villaurrutia, as a premise; and, as Cuesta observed in his review of *Raíz del hombre*, he needed to construct a metaphysic to bridge that disjunction.

In 'Monólogo', the metaphysic that inhabits the space between 'la nada' and 'el sueño' is not simply a philosophical construction but a linguistic one – 'las sílabas de tu nombre' cross his insomniac hours. This awareness of the linguistic aspect of 'los problemas del "conocimiento"' recurs throughout Paz's poems of these years. In *Bajo tu clara sombra* he describes his voice as 'arquitecto del más alto de los sueños',¹⁹ and refers in one of the sonnets later collected in *Primer día* to 'mis geométricas voces' (AOM, 17). Although, in *Vigilias*, Paz adopted the Nerudan metaphor of a poetry that penetrates an interior world – 'sólo la poesía, oscura y arrebatada, hierde en el universo y en su secreto' (PL, 65) – there is a tendency also to read the world as itself a language:

El mundo se nos presenta como una forma, como un sutil equilibrio – o desequilibrio – de proporciones; pero nosotros no podemos vivir en su desnuda sencillez: queremos que signifique algo, que deje de ser una **presencia**, y se convierta en una **representación**. (PL, 63)

The other side of this analogy is to see language as a world, and Paz frequently adopts the awareness that the *artepuristas* developed of the materiality of words: 'Nacían las palabras. / La sangre golpeaba en sus sílabas.' (BCS, 11); 'y como carne o fruto las palabras' (BCS, 15).

In his earliest poems, Paz uses Eliot to negate lyric effusion and the assertion of meaning. In the poems written around the period of *Raíz del hombre*, he attempts to construct a system of belief beyond that negation. The erotic materialism of *Residencia en la tierra* provides one particularly appropriate alternative, since it is partly formulated out of Neruda's own response to *The Waste Land*. However, it does not satisfy Paz's more rigorous sense both of man's separation from the world, and the role of a metaphysic in response to that separation. In 1978 Paz described a contrast between the 'zona de arenas movedizas' of the Contemporáneos and 'el materialismo teñido de animismo' of Neruda (Vill, 76). His awareness of the poem as language rather than as a straightforward path to material contact brings him into a closer alignment with the

¹⁹ *Bajo tu clara sombra y otros poemas sobre España* (Valencia: Ediciones Españolas, 1937), p. 11

Contemporáneos, and it is during this period that he embarked on a formative association with one of the chief members of the group, Jorge Cuesta.

Cuesta's review of *Raíz del hombre* arrived at its diagnosis of Paz's need for a 'metafísica' in terms that would have been familiar to Eliot:

La poesía de Octavio Paz no se resiste a una pasión de recomenzar, de repetir, de reproducir una voz de la que no llega a salir la satisfacción esperada por la impaciencia que la golpea. El efecto de esta violencia es que sus sentimientos destrocen las formas que lo solicitan, aunque sin apagarse [...] Pero quizá es más propio que digamos que es su objeto el que renace incesantemente de sus restos, y el que no deja de absorberlo. Y que la nota más característica de su poesía es una desesperación, que no tardará en precisarse en una metafísica, esto es, en una propiedad, en una necesidad del objeto de la poesía y no en un puro ocio psicológico del artista. (Cuesta, 9)

Paz's collection is analysed in terms of the relationship between a desiring self and the objects that it desires. The problem that Cuesta identifies is that desire exceeds the objects which might satisfy it – 'El efecto de esta violencia es que sus sentimientos destrocen las formas que lo solicitan.' Cuesta's reading has a strong affinity to Eliot's definition of the "objective correlative", which appeared in 'Hamlet and his Problems' (1919) - 'Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear' (SW, 86) - and which was reiterated in 'Lancelot Andrews' [sic], which had appeared in *Cruz y Raya*: 'sus emociones están plenamente contenidas en, y explicadas por, su objeto' (Marichalar, 84-5). The alternative to an objective metaphysic is 'un puro ocio psicológico', a contrast which underpins Eliot's objection to Valéry in 'Dante' (1920):

No emotion is contemplated by Dante purely in and for itself. The emotion of the person, or the emotion with which our attitude appropriately invests the person, is never lost or diminished, is always preserved entire, but is modified by the position assigned to the person in the eternal scheme. (SW, 141)

These similarities are at least partly attributable to direct knowledge of Eliot's work. It is most probable that Cuesta encountered an early version of the distinction between an objective and a psychological poetry in Eliot's 'Note sur Mallarmé et Poe', which appeared in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1926. Eliot contrasts the 'poète philosophique', such as Dante, who believes in a certain system, with the 'poète

“métaphysique””, such as Poe and Mallarmé, who employ theories which they don’t actually believe ‘pour raffiner et pour développer leur puissance de sensibilité et d’émotion’ (‘Note’, 525). M. E. González Padilla, in ‘La presencia de T. S. Eliot en México’, also claims that an annotated copy of Stephen Spender’s *The Destructive Element* (1935), which contains separate chapters on Eliot’s poetry and criticism, and which belonged to Xavier Villaurrutia, was ‘probably read’ by Jorge Cuesta.²⁰ Certainly, in a review of José Gorostiza’s *Muerte sin fin* of December 1939 he referred directly to Eliot’s ‘Dante’ of 1929.²¹

Yet the coincidence between Cuesta’s review of *Raíz del hombre* and some of Eliot’s critical thinking may not come from direct contact with Eliot so much as with Eliot’s own sources. Cuesta was notorious in Mexico as an advocate of the opposition between ‘classicism’ and ‘romanticism’, a pairing that he derived from France, just as Eliot had yoked his French reading onto the teachings of Irving Babbitt and the writings of T. E. Hulme. Cuesta refers directly in his essay ‘Clasicismo y romanticismo’ (1932) to one of the French influences on Eliot’s thought, Julien Benda:

Julien Benda ya describió la voluntad de estos románticos, que consiste en pretender para lo temporal, la categoría de lo espiritual.²²

If Cuesta did, as seems likely, read the article by Ramón Fernández, ‘Le clasicisme de T. S. Eliot’, in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1925, then a picture emerges in which Eliot appears not as the source of Cuesta’s use of the terms ‘classicism’ and ‘romanticism’ but as a companion on the way.

Cuesta shared Eliot’s awareness that a poet’s relation to the world was not unmediated, but structured, and that problems arose when that structure was a personal invention:

Esta necesidad de construirse un lenguaje personal para representar el mundo; de improvisar todo un sistema para coger una impresión aislada, para dibujar laboriosamente un objeto; de adaptarse diversamente a los aspectos mudables de las cosas, para detener su realidad fugitiva, es característica del arte contemporáneo.²³

²⁰ *Poesía y teatro de T. S. Eliot* (México: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1968), p. 298. Unfortunately, Dr. González Padilla was unable to tell me what had happened to Villaurrutia’s copy of *The Destructive Element* when I interviewed her in 2002.

²¹ *Poemas y ensayos*, vol. 3, (México: UNAM, 1978), p. 327.

²² *Poemas y ensayos* 2, 108.

²³ ‘Notas’, *Ulises* (octubre 1927), p. 32.

And like Eliot, Cuesta's response to the arbitrariness of an art that relies on personal improvisation to detain the objective world, that relies on originality, was to stress tradition and the presentness of the past:

Hay dos clases de románticos, dos clases de inconformes; unos, que declaran muerta a la tradición y que encuentran su libertad con ello; otros, que la declaran también muerta o en peligro de muerte y que pretenden resucitarla, conservarla. La tradición es tradición porque no muere, porque vive sin que la conserve nadie.²⁴

Classicism was then not only the doctrine that valued tradition but, in a provocation that would have been familiar to the author of *The Sacred Wood*, was itself tradition: 'No es una tradición, sino la tradición en sí'.²⁵ Cuesta's preoccupation with tradition provided an Eliotic counterbalance to D. H. Lawrence's influence on the young Paz. Paz, and indeed Eliot, praised Lawrence for his beliefs, but Eliot also criticized the lack of a traditional or orthodox basis in Lawrence's thinking:

The point is that Lawrence started life wholly free from any restriction of tradition or institution, that he had no guidance except the Inner light, the most untrustworthy and deceitful guide that ever offered itself to wandering humanity. (ASG, 59)

Cuesta provided a kind of surrogate Eliot for Paz, a role that did not stop at the review of *Raíz del hombre*. Paz had first met Cuesta in 1935, and he recalls in *Villaurrutia en persona y en obra* that this was the birth of a long relationship in which they would meet regularly to read work aloud and discuss ideas (*Vill*, 11). Cuesta had concluded that Paz's poems needed to find a 'metafísica', and I have argued that it was this need to formulate an adequately sophisticated belief that led Paz away from Neruda's answer to *The Waste Land*. Paz's meetings with Cuesta helped him to develop this more purely theoretical side of his work, and in an interview in *El Financiero* of 1994 he remembers the experience with enthusiasm:

²⁴ 'La literatura y el nacionalismo' (1932), in *Poemas y ensayos* 2, 98. Christopher Domínguez Michael describes this passage as a direct summary of Eliot's thinking: 'Enseguida, Cuesta resume las ideas de T. S. Eliot y declara que la tradición es inmortal e indiferente a los cuidados del prójimo', *Tiros en el concierto: Literatura mexicana del siglo V*, 2nd edn (México: Ediciones Era, 1999), p. 309. However, he does not provide evidence to confirm this assertion. I would argue that it represents a coincidence of viewpoint derived from sources that Eliot also knew rather than deriving directly from Eliot himself.

²⁵ *Poemas y ensayos* 2, 107.

Es maravilloso compartir una verdad, grande o pequeña, perseguida durante horas y horas. El gran premio es la contemplación silenciosa de constelaciones mentales acabadas de descubrir.²⁶

Neruda wished to pre-empt the need for socially constructed beliefs with a sensual relation to the physical world. The basic position of Cuesta's seminal analysis of Mexican culture, 'El clasicismo mexicano' (1934), asserted that socially constructed, and inherited, beliefs could not be pre-empted. Thus even nationalist Mexican literature was a result of an inherited trend for exoticism:

El mexicanismo en nuestra poesía contemporánea, no es sino un "modernismo" aplicado al paisaje de México [...] En otras palabras, la literatura mexicanista no ha sido una literatura mexicana, sino el exoticismo de una literatura extranjera.²⁷

Paz adopted this consciousness of the social construction of experience, exercising it in *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950), 'Introducción a la historia de la poesía mexicana' (1950)²⁸ and his 'Apuntes' of 1943: 'El nacionalismo mexicano en el arte es una consecuencia del exotismo europeo' (*PL*, 357). Cuesta's and Eliot's awareness of the restrictions that bear upon human artistic and epistemological endeavour provides a new dimension to Paz's leftist concern with social and historical determinants.

One of the characteristics that Paz most admired in Cuesta was his critical intelligence. In the discussion of his relationship with Cuesta in *El Financiero*, he declares:

La pasión crítica no es sino una forma derivada de lo que a mí me parece que es esencial en la vida del espíritu: la pasión por la idea. (p. 69)

I have argued that Eliot entered a tradition of 'conciencia crítica' in Mexican literature that runs from Ramón López Velarde to the Contemporáneos. Paz explored this tendency of Eliot and Villaurrutia in counterpoint to poets of 'exaltación lírica', such as St.-John Perse, Carlos Pellicer and Pablo Neruda. Yet in 'Ética del artista', he expressed great hostility towards the tendency of a critical, sceptical intelligence to negate belief. Cuesta exercised a political and moral interest uncommon among the Contemporáneos which reassured Paz. He also argued for the positive value of the critical intelligence,

²⁶ José Luis Perdomo Orallana, 'Me asombra haber llegado a los 80: Octavio Paz', *El Financiero*, 30 marzo 1994, p. 69.

²⁷ *Poemas y ensayos* 2, 192.

²⁸ 'Los poetas del siglo XVII, a semejanza de los románticos, descubren la naturaleza a través de sus modelos europeos' (*Peras*, 13).

arguing in 'El clasicismo mexicano' that it was in fact the critical aspect of Spanish literature that was the true inheritance of Mexico: 'Desde un principio florecieron en México las formas críticas y reflexivas de la literatura castellana.'²⁹

Paz's relationship with Cuesta enabled him to move beyond the polemic of 'Ética del artista' to a closer appreciation of the Eliot that the Contemporáneos were reading. In fact, it was through Cuesta that Paz was accepted by the group, and so was brought into contact with figures such as Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano and Octavio G. Barreda, who would be responsible for key translations of Eliot in Mexico in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Paz recalled that some of Cuesta's friends among the Contemporáneos had objected to his sympathetic review of *Raíz del hombre* because of Paz's political views (*Vill*, 13). Then one afternoon in 1937, Paz met up with Cuesta for what he had expected to be a casual lunch with Cuesta and some of his friends. Those friends turned out to be the Contemporáneos:

De pronto me di cuenta de que se me había invitado a una suerte de ceremonia de iniciación. Mejor dicho, a un examen: yo iba a ser el examinado y Xaxier [Villaurrutia] y Jorge [Cuesta] mis padrinos. (*Vill*, 13)

In spite of some interrogation on the disparity between his political views and his poetic tastes, Paz was accepted and invited to attend the group's monthly lunches.³⁰ This productive new intellectual contact was postponed, however, as Paz left Mexico City for Mérida in the Yucatán to help found a school for the children of agricultural workers.

Paz's experience of peasant life in the Yucatán had a strong political and personal resonance. His father had lived with the peasants of Morelos, Guerrero and Puebla in the Mexican Revolution while working on agrarian reform. What Paz saw of the lives of the workers in Mérida, 'the friends of my father' as he described them in his interview for *Bookmark* (p. 5), provided stark evidence that the reforms of his father had failed.

The other striking feature of his experience was the Yucatán landscape:

²⁹ *Poemas y ensayos* 2, 181.

³⁰ In a letter to Pere Gimferrer of 16 January 1977, Paz recalls: 'Hace años, muchos años, Xavier Villaurrutia, al leer algo mío, me dijo: qué gusto me da que haya otro gran poeta', *Memorias y palabras: Cartas a Pere Gimferrer 1966-1997* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1999), p. 145.

Por primera vez vivía en tierra caliente, no en un trópico verde y lujorioso sino blanco y seco, una tierra llana rodeada de infinito por todas partes. Soberanía del espacio: el tiempo sólo era un parpadeo. (*It*, 53)

Here was the arid landscape of *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*. It is unsurprising, then, that the poem he wrote from his encounter with it, *Entre la piedra y la flor*, provides his most extensive poetic use of Eliot so far. Just as Cuesta had argued that ‘mexicanismo’ was ‘el exotismo de una literatura extranjera’, so the poem that Paz wrote of a native Mexican landscape and its indigenous people was strongly guided by his reading of a North American poet living in London. In ‘Me asombra haber llegado a los 80’ Paz described the intention behind his poem:

Se me ocurrió escribir un poema que [...] tuviese una proyección a un tiempo histórico y espiritual: fusión de tiempos y de culturas. Recuerda quizá *The Waste Land*, cuya lectura me había impresionado mucho en esos años. Escribí mi poema varias veces y nunca quedé satisfecho. De todos modos, me parece que, por lo menos logré expresar, así haya sido de manera muy imperfecta, unas cuantas cosas. Una: el paisaje yucateco; otra una visión de los indios nada sentimental ni ideológico, a igual distancia del realismo superficial y del didacticismo [...] También intenté mostrar la relación extraña entre la sociedad india tradicional y la realidad desalmada del dinero, el dios moderno. (p. 57)

The link to Eliot is repeated in ‘Itinerario’ (1994) with the reservation of ‘quizá’ excised:

Inspirada por mi lectura de Eliot, se me ocurrió escribir un poema en el que la aridez de la planicie yucateca, una tierra reseca y cruel, apareciese como la imagen de lo que hacía el capitalismo – que para mí era el demonio de la abstracción – con el hombre y la naturaleza: chuparles la sangre, sorberles su substancia, volverlos hueso y piedra. (*It*, 53)

Paz admired Eliot for reintroducing a historical reality to the poem which ‘el simbolismo había expulsado’. The coincidence of the Yucatán landscape with *The Waste Land* enabled Paz to bring some of the meaning that he had found in Eliot to bear on his own experience. In his interview for *Bookmark*, however, he acknowledged that the specifically political meaning that he read into the landscape was at odds with Eliot’s own beliefs:

Well then I wanted to do something similar but analogous, but very different from my own point of view. As a Mexican, with a Mexican subject, would be American subject. And also from a very different point of view because I didn’t agree at all

with the philosophy in Eliot's poetry. He was Anglo-Catholic, royalist, etc. and I was radical and leftist with libertarian leanings. (*Bookmark*, 6)

As I shall argue, this conflict between Paz's leftism and Eliot's conservatism, which I do not consider as itself absolute, is further attenuated in *Entre la piedra y la flor* by a poetic method which does not lend itself, in spite of Paz's wishes, to a clearly defined expression of political standpoint. Paz's description of an 'American subject', however, does suggest an indigenist theme that would take the poem away from Eliot. Nevertheless, the question of solipsism that arises in any indigenist project – can the primitive be known? – has its corollary in the various failed relationships of *The Waste Land*; and the sense of a 'sociedad india tradicional' operating within the modern world of capitalism recalls *The Waste Land*'s conjunction of mythical past and sordid present, which is clearly in Paz's mind when he refers to a 'fusión de tiempos y de culturas' in *Entre la piedra y la flor*.

The 322 lines of *Entre la piedra y la flor* are Paz's first attempt to approach anything like the extension of *The Waste Land*. However, as in 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada' and 'Desde el principio', *The Hollow Men* provides a more obvious formal model, and Paz employs short, paratactic statements. The first two of the poem's five sections describe the landscape of the Yucatán while the third addresses a worker on the land, and the final two sections engage in a satirical condemnation of the economic system that reigns over the cultivation of *henequén*, a type of cactus.

Frances Chiles notes the affinity between the landscape that Paz encounters and Eliot's desert landscapes:

Stark, elemental imagery (in which we catch occasional glimpses of Eliot's landscape) depicts a no-man's-land of primal rock, scant vegetation, and unrelenting, suffocating heat.³¹

For Chiles, in an approach influenced by Northrop Frye, this is an 'archetypal wasteland' (p. 23). The resort to archetypal meaning attempts to fix in an objective scheme the more flexible action of the poem which reveals a speaker in the act of creating meaning that has both an objective and a subjective aspect. Geoffrey Hartman describes the approach as "“superductive”" and complains that it is 'too good a conductor of the individual poem out of itself into some larger spiritual form'.³² Irma

³¹ Octavio Paz: *The Mythic Dimension* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 25.

³² *The Fate of Reading and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 278.

González, in her Master's thesis, is more aware of the different stages of the process, and she observes that Paz's images 'pasan del terreno descriptivo al psicológico y después al simbólico', although her reading of their symbolic aspect does tend, like Chiles' approach, towards the mechanical.³³

The opening section of the poem reiterates a sense of aridity and, located within that aridity, unsatisfied human thirst: 'estéril vaho', 'piedra seca', 'círculo sediento', 'descarnada sed', 'el jadeo reseco de la tierra', 'horas áridas'.³⁴ As an image of desire frustrated this has a wide extension. It is able to carry the biblical meaning of a spiritual quest frustrated, which is active in Eliot, and noted by González; but it can also be read, in a leftist context, as an image of a potential for liberty restrained by circumstance. Paz projects this human struggle against constriction into the landscape by identifying the growth of the *henequén* with human awakening:

Amanecemos ciegas,
desesperadas fibras,
tercas raíces mudas
obstinada ternura de raíces
hundidas en el jadeo reseco de la tierra.
Amanecemos. (EPF, 1-2)

The repeated references to roots echo Neruda's *Tres cantos materiales* and the 'roots that clutch' of 'The Burial of the Dead', a line which Paz almost translates as, 'Miserables raíces atadas a las piedras' (EPF, 2). The struggle for growth is also clearly reminiscent of the opening to 'The Burial of the Dead'. There, the speaker's identity with new growth is reluctant and fearful. Here, the identity is confident, and Paz employs the first person plural - 'amanecemos' - implying, as in 'Desde el principio', that the experience is not individual but the shared struggle of a community. As I have demonstrated, Paz consciously acknowledged this intention that the landscape 'apareciese como la imagen de lo que hacía el capitalismo'.

A problem arises, however, that while the *henequén* provides an eloquent image of a life force struggling against constriction, it does not lend itself so readily to the articulation of a Marxist critique of capitalist economics. As Paz develops the image it is

³³ Octavio Paz y T. S. Eliot: *Un diálogo en la tradición de la ruptura* (Tesis de maestría, UNAM, 1991), pp. 154-5.

³⁴ *Entre la piedra y la flor* (México: Nueva Voz, 1941), pp. 1 & 2. Although the poem was not published until 1941, it carries the note 'Mérida, Yucatán, 1937' at the end (p. 15).

not in fact towards an analysis of objective historical circumstance, but to human emotion:

El henequén, inmóvil y rabioso,
en sus índices verdes
hace visible lo que nos remueve,
el callado furor que nos devora. (EPF, 2)

A portrayal of circumstance has become an emotional response to that circumstance. The implication, naturally, is that anger is the result of injustice, and hence it is a moral judgement on a specific political situation. Nevertheless, the artistic method that Paz has chosen – projection of human meaning onto a landscape – has a limited capacity for the end that he intends – the demonstration of an objective historical situation. He is able, through this method, to express anger, and to suggest a cause for it, but he is not able to get at that cause, to articulate it in a way that could then direct his anger.

The problem that Paz encounters is that the landscape won't express the meaning that he is looking for. The opening of the second section is an echo of the 'Son of man passage' from 'The Burial of the Dead', but it is also, by its questioning, a recognition that the previous section has failed to find satisfactory meaning:

¿Qué tierra es ésta?
¿qué extraña violencia alimenta
en su cáscara de piedra? (EPF, 5)

In the 'Notas' that Paz wrote from the Yucatán for *El Nacional* at the time of his stay, he described the landscape as 'una naturaleza que me rechaza'.³⁵ In this section, he acknowledges that it resists the designs that he has upon it to embody meaning. The *henequén* then becomes an image not of human struggle in the world but of the poet's solipsism, and his anger:

Furiosos años lentos [...]
en un verdor ensimismado. (EPF, 6)

The third section turns from the projection of meaning onto the landscape, and Paz addresses one of the agricultural workers directly. This shift to an indigenist theme still fails to articulate his political intention, however. As the section progresses he calls

³⁵ *El Nacional*, 8 mayo 1937, 2nd section, p. 1.

upon the 'entre' of *The Hollow Men* in an attempt to provide an encompassing summary of the worker's situation:

Entre el primer silencio y el postrero,
entre la piedra y la flor,
tú, el círculo de ternura que alimenta la noche. (EPF, 9)

The final two sections then move into a mode of explicit analysis to explain 'lo que te mueve por la tierra' (EPF, 10). This shift of perspective calls for a different type of poem, and as Manuel Ulacia points out, Quevedo's *Letrillas satíricas*, 'La pobreza. El dinero' and 'Poderoso caballero es don Dinero', now provide a model (*Árbol*, 55). Yet the tone of satirical condemnation that he adopts from Quevedo is better suited to express indignation at the situation of the peasants than it is to demonstrate 'la relación extraña entre la sociedad india tradicional y la realidad desalmada del dinero, el dios moderno'. There is a tendency either towards overwrought metaphor – 'Pasas como una flor por este infierno estéril' – or towards sermonizing – 'Porque el dinero es infinito y crea desiertos infinitos' (EPF, 12 & 13). The final section, in a gesture that acknowledges the presence of his anger even as it concedes its impotence, then calls for annihilation:

Dáme, llama invisible, espada fría,
tu persistente cólera,
para acabar con todo,
oh mundo seco,
oh mundo desangrado,
para acabar con todo. (EPF, 14)

Paz's accounts of the thinking that lay behind the poem indicate that his experience of the Yucatán coincided at more than one point with his reading of Eliot. Yet Eliot proves less amenable to the poem that Paz wanted to write than these accounts suggest. The merging of past and present that Paz found in *The Waste Land* – a technique that he would later refer to as 'simultaneísmo' – while seemingly a promising frame for the confluence of an ancient indigenous people and a modern capitalist economy, actually finds scant expression in the poem itself. The arid landscapes of *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men* provided more productive models for a poem that was part objective description, part psychological projection. Ermilio Abreu Gómez, in a contemporary review, praised this aspect of the poem:

La capacidad poética de Paz no radica en una concepción objetiva de los hechos (como hace Othón); ni en una concepción subjetiva de los mismos (como acontece en González Martínez). La capacidad poética de Octavio Paz se condiciona a la recreación de lo objetivo-subjetivo.³⁶

The problem for Paz, however, was that the projection of feeling into a landscape does not lead naturally to the construction of an objective understanding of the relation between individuals and economic circumstance. As a method it is too ambiguous for such a project, as a review by José Luis Martínez unwittingly attested when it decided that Paz had written not a socialist but a nationalist poem about 'el crecimiento sordo y rencoroso de México y lo mexicano'.³⁷

Entre la piedra y la flor confirms Jorge Cuesta's analysis of *Raíz del hombre*. A forceful emotional disposition, in this case an angry one, is still searching for an adequate 'metafísica' through which to understand, and relate to, the world. Paz admired Eliot for bringing a historical reality back into the poem, which implied some coherent understanding of history. Yet Paz's earliest poems had employed Eliot to negate inherited beliefs that now seemed inadequate. Eliot didn't provide a vision that could mitigate his sense of 'horror'. Paz's experiment in the Yucatán demonstrated that Eliot was not so amenable to the kind of political thinking that he hoped at the time to include in his own poems.

Paz was never happy with *Entre la piedra y la flor*: 'No quedé satisfecho y me propuse, vanamente, corregirlo' (*OC13*, 29). In the version of the poem that appears in his *Obra poética* (1990), much of the personal animus that was projected into the landscape is removed:

Amanecemos piedras.

Nada sino la luz. No hay nada
sino la luz contra la luz.

La tierra:
palma de una mano de piedra. (*OP*, 92)

In the original, this had been an image of anger, 'la luz contra la luz rabiosa' (*EPF*, 3). Similarly, the earlier 'furiosos años lentos' of the agave, now draw the conclusion that

³⁶ 'Entre la piedra y la flor de Octavio Paz', *Tierra Nueva*, 9-10 (mayo-agosto 1941), p. 174.

³⁷ 'Octavio Paz: Entre la piedra y la flor', *Letras de México*, 15 mayo 1941, p. 4.

‘su violencia es quietud’ (*OP*, 94). The speaker seems less determined to find a specific meaning in the landscape, and more conscious of his own role as interpreter. The *henequén* is associated with language and is described as ‘un signo’ (*OP*, 94). His earlier interrogation is replaced by acceptance of the physical world’s resistance to interpretation - ‘el agua [...] que no dice nada’ (*OP*, 92) is no longer a symbol for the redemption of spiritual aridity, nor for anything else. The satirical final section is still insistent, and the poem still seems oddly divided between its different sections. The fact that he maintained the more explicit satirical content indicates a continuing desire to include a certain form of political statement in the poem which never found entirely convincing expression. Nevertheless, the revised landscape poem displays a growth of self-consciousness by replacing a particular interpretation with a more developed awareness of interpretation itself as an act. The fact that he continued to revise and publish the poem in successive editions of *Libertad bajo palabra* indicates the importance to Paz of the experience that it attempts to describe.

During his stay in the Yucatán, Paz was invited by Pablo Neruda to attend the Segundo Congreso Internacional de Escritores Antifascistas para la Defensa de la Cultura along with Carlos Pellicer in a Spain embroiled in civil war. While the experience of this excursion had no direct bearing on his relationship with T. S. Eliot, it nevertheless proved a crucial stage in the development of his political thinking which, as *Entre la piedra y la flor* demonstrates, was an integral part of his reading of Eliot.

Spain provided Paz with a confirmation of his emotional attachment to socialist ideals. In a well known anecdote, he recalled being brought food and wine by local workers while sheltering from an air-raid outside Valencia. ‘España me enseñó el significado de la palabra fraternidad’ (*PC*, 65), he concluded. Yet his experience of the official left was not so fortunate. In *Itinerario*, Paz describes being met by Pablo Neruda and Ilya Ehrenburg on arriving in Spain and being quizzed on Trotsky, a pariah among the company of the Congress at the time:

De pronto, con voz ausente, murmuró [Ilya Ehrenburg]: ‘Ah, Trotski...’ Y dirigiéndose a Pellicer: ‘Usted, ¿qué opina?’ Hubo una pausa. Neruda cambió conmigo una mirada de angustia mientras Pellicer decía, con aquella voz suya de bajo de ópera: ‘¿Trotski? Es el agitador político más grande de la historia... después, naturalmente, de San Pablo.’ Nos reímos de dientes afuera. Ehrenburg se levantó y Neruda me dijo al oído: ‘El poeta católico hará que nos fusilen...’ (*It*, 59-60)

At the Congress itself, which moved to condemn André Gide for talking openly about his visit to the Soviet Union under Stalin, Pellicer spoke in Gide's favour and abstained from the vote, along with Paz. Neither Paz nor Pellicer was a member of the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (LEAR), the Mexican satellite of the Union of Soviet Writers dedicated to socialist realism - 'Aquello me repugnaba, me parecía la muerte del arte' (*Solo*, 63) – and they were generally mistrusted as a result.

However, there was one group at the Congress that was sympathetic to Paz, the writers of the magazine *Hora de España*. Arturo Serrano Plaia delivered a collective statement from the group at the Congress which insisted that art could not be dictated to by politics (*Árbol*, 58-9). The group shared Paz's poetic tastes and his mistrust of the leftist orthodoxy that surrounded them. In *Solo a dos voces* (p. 119), he described his night-time walks in Valencia with one of the group's members, Manuel Altolaguirre, who published a collection of Paz's poems, *Bajo tu clara sombra y otros poemas sobre España* (1937). He had also translated Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi' in 1935.³⁸ It seems likely that they discussed Eliot. Altolaguirre could provide an example of a writer who managed to accommodate a politically Conservative poet such as Eliot with his own more militant beliefs. Paz was distant from Eliot's politics in Spain, and he wrote an angry piece in *El Popular* that castigated the language of 'order' that Eliot favoured:

Pero los reaccionarios, los falangistas, los militares, las clases feudales, el Clero Romano, que tantos crímenes se ha anotado en la historia española, y, en fin, todos los defensores del "orden", instigaban al desorden y al caos.³⁹

Yet he also met Stephen Spender (*It*, 58), again a writer with sympathetic political views who had nevertheless written about Eliot and been published in *The Criterion*.

Spain confirmed Alberti's advice that there was a value in poetic revolution beyond political allegiance. Paz described reading Luis Cernuda, another admirer of T. S. Eliot, who would be the first Spanish poet to accommodate the influence of *Four Quartets*:

³⁸ 'Journey of the Magi'. "1616", (*English and Spanish Poetry*), London, 8 (1935), pp. 7-10.

³⁹ 'Las enseñanzas de una juventud. El camino de la unidad', *El Popular*, 3 agosto 1938, p. 5. Eliot had himself responded to the Civil War with an accusation that the English press were encouraging 'a deterioration of political thinking [...] by simplifying the issues in very different and very imperfectly understood countries, by resolving emotional tension in the minds of their readers by directing their sympathies all one way, and consequently encouraging mental sloth [...] As long as we are not compelled in our own interest to take sides, I do not see why we should do so on insufficient knowledge: and even any eventual partisanship should be held with reservations, humility and misgiving', 'Commentary', *Criterion*, 16, 63 (January, 1937), pp. 289-90.

Mi lectura de *La realidad y el deseo* en plena guerra de España fue decisiva porque en la atmósfera de incendio y de lucha escuchaba una voz profundamente individual, en la cual la subversión moral se unía a la subversión poética y era imposible identificar a la revolución social con la subversión poética. El poeta iba más allá, traspasaba, diríamos, la lucha revolucionaria y me mostraba otro mundo. (Solo, 65-7)

The significance of these experiences would become apparent in the ensuing years as Paz's relationship with the official left worsened.

The mid-1930s see Paz engaged in a project to articulate beliefs within his poems, and in *Raíz del hombre* he flirts with an erotic vision that had been Neruda's answer to *The Waste Land*. Paz is too conscious a poet, however, to surrender entirely to Neruda's materialism. His own critical intelligence is fostered by Jorge Cuesta during these years, who is himself a kind of surrogate Eliot in Mexico, and the lessons learnt in this relationship are manifested throughout Paz's career. Cuesta identifies Paz's need to elaborate a 'metafísica' beyond his purely political beliefs, and it is during this period that Paz's leftist commitment begins to show signs of strain. The political ambitions of *¡No pasarán!* are dismissed by Ortiz de Montellano, and *Entre la piedra y la flor* enjoys only limited success at deriving political analysis from the 'historical' relevance of Eliot. A crucial rupture, which will worsen as the decade progresses, is also opened in Spain between Paz and the orthodox left. However, the unorthodox left that he encounters there, embodied in figures such as Manuel Altolaguirre and Luis Cernuda, provide an example of politically kindred writers who are nevertheless able to pursue an interest in T. S. Eliot's work.

Chapter Six

Taller

When Paz returned to Mexico City from Spain in 1938, he renewed the contact with the Contemporáneos which his excursion to the Yucatán had interrupted. He now attended the group's daily meetings at El Café París, after which he would wander the streets of Mexico City. He later described this experience and the poem that ensued:

Yo sentía que caminaba entre ruinas y que los transeúntes eran fantasmas. De esos años son los sonetos que llamé *Crepúsculos de la ciudad* en homenaje y réplica a Lugones pero, asimismo, a Xavier Villaurrutia. (*Vill*, 15)

Although the title acknowledges Lugones and Villaurrutia, the vision of 'ruinas' and 'fantasmas' also recalls Eliot's 'unreal city' (*CPP*, 62). As I have demonstrated, Paz's early poems associate Eliot closely with Villaurrutia, and he is a natural companion for Lugones, who was Laforgue's chief heir in Spanish America. Judith Myers Hoover finds an echo of the third of Eliot's 'Preludes' - 'trampled by insistent feet / at four and five and six o'clock' - in the lines:

Yazgo a mis pies, me miro en el acero

de la piedra gastada y del asfalto;
pisan opacos muertos maquinales,
no mi sombra, mi cuerpo verdadero.¹

One can't be certain that Paz read the 'Preludes' before 1944-45, the years he spent in the United States, where he read Eliot 'con fervor',² and lines from *The Waste Land* - 'Llevaban todos los ojos clavados / Delante de sus pies y exhalaban suspiros' and 'Mis pies están en Moorgate, y mi corazón / Bajo mis pies' (Flores, pp. 15 & 30) - seem as likely a source for the passage quoted above. However, Hoover's argument for the cityscape of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' as a determining influence on 'Crepúsculos' (Hoover, 23) is more convincing. Rodolfo Usigli's translation of the

¹ 'The Urban Nightmare: Alienation Imagery in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot and Octavio Paz', *Journal of Spanish Studies*, 6, 1 (1978), p. 24; 'Crepúsculos de la ciudad', *Letras de México*, 3, 18 (15 junio 1942), p. 3.

² 'Los pasos contados', *Camp de l'arpa. Revista de literatura*, 4, 74 (abril 1980), p. 55.

poem, with its admission that 'fuí por calles estrechas al crepúsculo', had appeared in the Mexican periodical *Poesía* in 1938.³ The urban setting of 'Prufrock' would be particularly conspicuous for a Mexican reader arriving at the poem after *The Waste Land*, and also after the setting 'a lo largo de la calle' of 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', which had appeared in *Sur* the year before.⁴

The first sonnet of 'Crepúsculos' applies the arid landscape of Eliot, which had served as both literal description and metaphorical comment in the Yucatán, to an urban setting:

Impuro viento sopla sus desiertos;
su estéril lengua torna el cielo fosa;
teje lívida luz yedra ruinosa
sobre los muros calcinados, yertos.

Hombres paralizados, si no muertos,
por un antiguo horror que no reposa;
ceniza en que se sueña cada cosa;
ojos sin ver, eternamente abiertos;

calles en que la nada desemboca;
tumba del tiempo, páramo de hastío;
multitudes de piedra y de pecado:

todo lo que mi lengua nombra o toca
yace, ciudad, en ti; yace vacío,
en tu pecho de piedra sepultado. ('Crepúsculos', 3)

Hoover finds an echo of the 'Streets that follow like a tedious argument' from 'Prufrock' (*CPP*, 13) in the 'calles en que la nada desemboca' of the third stanza (Hoover, 23),⁵ which also summons Heidegger. Paz merges the urban setting of 'Prufrock' with the hybrid urban and desert landscapes of *The Waste Land*, a practice that may have been prompted by an ambiguity in Usigli's translation which renders the

³ 'El canto de amor de J. Alfred Prufrock', *Poesía*, (suplemento), 2 (abril 1938), p. 6.

⁴ 'Rapsodia de una noche ventosa', *Sur*, 29 (febrero 1937), p. 43. Although Paz never refers directly to Irazusta's translation, he was reading *Sur* at this time, and he does mention an unpublished short story that bears a strong resemblance to the talking streetlamp of Eliot's poem: 'Más tarde escribí otros cuentos, con mayores pretensiones literarias y con temas urbanos que me parecían insólitos, como las confidencias de una esquina a un farol' (*OC13*, 18).

⁵ Hoover refers to a later version of 'Crepúsculos' which was published in the 1974 edition of *Libertad bajo palabra*. I have indicated points where my argument diverges from Hoover's as a result of the different versions consulted.

'half-deserted streets' of Eliot as 'calles semidesiertas' – both 'half-empty' and 'half-desert' streets (Usigli, 3).

The opening sonnet of 'Crepúsculos' also introduces the suggestion of a Christian frame - 'multitudes de piedra y de pecado' – within which this world of 'hombres paralizados' might be understood, or even, to follow the logic of a Christian analogy, redeemed. Jorge Cuesta had predicted that Paz's poetry 'no tardará en precisarse en una metafísica'. However, the Christian metaphysic that recurs throughout 'Crepúsculos' is simultaneously employed and negated. God is 'un hueco dios', and in the fourth sonnet, titled 'Cielo', both literal sky and heaven, he employs the 'entre' of *The Hollow Men* to describe an existence,

...sin puertas ni asidero,
entre la tierra, sed de labio fiero,
y el otro cielo prometido, ausente. ('Crepúsculos', 3)

The speaker finds himself trapped – he cannot believe in a 'cielo prometido', nor can he offer an alternative to it. The beliefs that are available to him don't fit his world. *The Waste Land*, like any poem that employs a fragmentary form, upsetting the relation between part and whole, between image and the interpretation placed upon that image, must necessarily sacrifice claims for conclusive meaning. What it loses, however, in terms of a philosophy, it gains in a capacity to dramatize a human desire for meaning. 'Crepúsculos' portrays this action of a speaker attempting to construct meaning. Paz has moved on from 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada', which lamented the loss of mythological signs now 'borrados de los bloques eternos', to a more ambiguous stance in which he is both trapped inside, and excluded from, the beliefs he has inherited. 'Crepúsculos' looks forward to some of Paz's most persistent use of Eliot in the 1940s.

Jorge Cuesta had drawn a contrast between the search for a metaphysic and 'ocio psicológico'. The failure of 'Crepúsculos' to find an adequate metaphysic leads to an examination of self, and Hoover notes that in the third sonnet observation of the outside world becomes an exploration of the persona (p. 23). Yet the speaker finds the same desert inside as out – 'palpo ceniza y nada' - a process that is repeated in the fifth sonnet which, by way of the observation 'puñado de aridez mi conciencia', concludes 'del hombre solo queda su desierto' ('Crepúsculos', 3).

The sense of entrapment - 'sin puertas', 'solitarias fronteras sin salida' - that takes hold of the speaker in 'Crepúsculos' reiterates a feeling that was present in *Entre*

la piedra y la flor, and which manifested itself as a call for annihilation. Hoover reads a similar pattern in the later poem:

In the final sonnet of ‘Crepúsculos de la ciudad’, all the images of life in the alienated world of the modern city, evoked throughout the poem, are brought together once more, and the ultimate self-destruction of this world, as in *The Waste Land*, is foretold. (p. 24)

This is a debatable reading of the *The Waste Land*’s tentative conclusion. It is also a particular reading of ‘Crepúsculos’. Hoover quotes from the version that appeared in the 1974 edition of *Libertad bajo palabra*. In the original version that appeared in *Letras de México* in 1942, however, another two sonnets continue the journey ‘hacia la nada, sola certidumbre’ of sonnet six. The ‘nada’ now acquires a more positive value, as the speaker retreats into a primary self:

En el abismo de mi ser nativo,
en mi nada primera, me desvivo:
frente de mí yo mismo, devorado.

The conclusion is then ambivalent:

Y nada queda, sino el goce impío
de la razón, cayendo en la inefable
y helada intimidad de su vacío. (p. 3)

He has moved beyond earlier constraint, but into a vacuum not freedom. In *Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión* (1943), which I will discuss later in this chapter, Paz quotes Francisco de Quevedo’s ‘Lágrimas de un penitente’ for the classic expression of human reason in free-fall: ‘las aguas del abismo / donde me enamoraba de mí mismo’ (PL, 300). It is a development of the sceptical, or negating Eliot that he uses to question belief in his early poems. *Entre la piedra y la flor* had struggled to express an understanding of the world which it failed to realize. ‘Crepúsculos’ then takes an epistemological turn, representing the individual engaged in that struggle and so making the struggle rather than its outcome the subject of the poem.

Both in its themes and setting, ‘Crepúsculos de la ciudad’ anticipates much of Paz’s poetry of the ensuing decade. In an interview with Anthony Stanton, he described it as the precursor, although ‘en una forma más tradicional’, of his urban poems of the

later 1940s.⁶ Certainly, his syntax, and use of the sonnet form have more in common with the neo-baroque experiments of *Primer día* and *Bajo tu clara sombra* than with his more colloquial later work. Nevertheless, the degree of self-consciousness with which ‘Crepúsculos’ presents the attempt to arrive at a ‘metafísica’ marks a significant development in his continuing dialogue with Eliot.

The case that Judith Myers Hoover makes is convincing for the influence on ‘Crepúsculos’ of ‘Prufrock’ as a poem about the city. The translator of *El canto de amor de J. Alfred Prufrock*, the Mexican playwright Rodolfo Usigli, added a further significance, however, to Eliot’s poem. Usigli was not a member of the Contemporáneos, but Paz describes him as ‘amigo a medias de Xavier Villaurrutia’ (*ALP*, 53), and the copy of his translation in the Biblioteca Nacional in Mexico City is inscribed by the author ‘A Xavier’ – presumably Villaurrutia – ‘“que me acompañó en el descubrimiento” de T. S. E., y con quien a menudo discutí las ideas de Eliot confundiéndolo un poco con él’. Paz also takes care to note that Usigli had no belief in the efficacy of revolution (*ALP*, 50) – a central issue to divide Paz and the Contemporáneos. Given that Paz described Usigli’s translation as ‘producto de una afinidad. No porque Usigli se pareciera a Eliot sino a Prufrock’ (*PC*, 22),⁷ Prufrock’s own inability to act in a life ‘measured out [...] with coffee spoons’ (*CPP*, 14) becomes associated with Usigli’s, and by extension with the Contemporáneos’, refusal to admit broader political action into their work. Usigli’s translation accentuated the sense of vacillation in the poem by rendering both the ‘Do I dare?’ and the ‘Why should I presume?’ of Eliot with the one verb, ‘atreverse’. The alternation in the Eliot between ‘dare’ and the different ‘presume’ with its cushion of ironic politesse, is replaced by a much starker litany. The repeated ‘atreverse’ presents a steady provocation in the translation which the speaker is not able to attenuate with comedy.

In suggesting that Paz read Prufrock’s inability to ‘force the moment to its crisis’ (*CPP*, 15) as a critique of the Contemporáneos, I have drawn a large inference from disparate evidence. However, it would not be an isolated case of Paz drawing Eliot into local polemic. I claimed earlier that Paz’s injunction in ‘Ética del artista’ that ‘Hemos de ser hombres completos, íntegros’ (*PL*, 116) implied an attack on the Contemporáneos as

⁶ ‘Genealogía de un libro: *Libertad bajo palabra*’, *Vuelta*, 12, 145 (diciembre 1988), p. 15.

⁷ In a letter to Pere Gimferrer of 30 August 1982, Paz also describes Usigli as ‘una incongruente versión polaco-italo-mexicana del Prufrock de Eliot (conservado en alcohol)’ (*MyP*, 230).

'hollow men'. In an essay of 1938, 'Pablo Neruda en el corazón', which is in many ways a continuation of 'Ética', Paz makes the comparison explicit:

Y muchos de estos poemas, de estos hermosos poemas, impersonales como la misma "eternidad", no eran más que casas vacías. Ya la poesía, por boca de Eliot, había delatado a sus raptos falsos: a los hombres huecos, a los hombres embutidos de serrín. A esos hombres que no dan más que vueltas al nopal, al nopal a las cinco de la mañana. A esos cobardes sin paciencia, sin heroísmo, que sin usar de su paciencia para que lo sagrado les destruya la carne y les disuelva los huesos, sino armados de su pura ciencia, de su impura ciencia pura, sin exponer nada, acechaban con trampas a la poesía. Los hombres huecos no hacían más que trampas: sus poemas, sus hermosos poemas, no eran sino ingeniosas trampas vacías, casas blandas y huecas, arteras como ellos. Y como la poesía no acudió a la estéril cita, convirtieron a la cita en la poesía, a la casa en su habitante, al poema en poesía. Casa de citas. E inventaron que la poesía no existía: dijeron que la poesía era lo no real, aquello que nadie había visto: una ausencia. La nostalgia de los desterrados hijos de Adán, el sueño, solamente el sueño, de los hombres. (Olvidaban que el sueño es otra cosa: que el sueño son los recuerdos, los pecados, los remordimientos de los hombres: en suma, el hombre).⁸

Given that Paz was now meeting regularly with the Contemporáneos, this is a harsh attack which commandeers an uncharacteristically militant Eliot - 'Ya la poesía, por boca de Eliot, había delatado...'. The reference that Paz makes to *The Hollow Men* is extensive, and implies a close reading of León Felipe's translation. Could the otherwise peculiar condemnation of 'cobardes sin paciencia' - as if a patient coward would be less blameworthy than an impatient one - also be misremembered from 'What the Thunder Said'? There, in lines that employ the first person plural of *The Hollow Men*, 'Nosotros que vivíamos antes estamos ahora muriendo / con un poco de paciencia' (Flores, 37).⁹ Did Paz remember this as 'con poca paciencia', with little patience?

In 'Ética', Paz attacked the 'obra escéptica y corrosiva' (PL, 115) of the Contemporáneos and opposed them with an 'arte de tesis' which had 'un valor testimonial e histórico' and which was closely associated with his reading of Eliot. Yet in 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada', he used an amalgam of Eliot and Villaurrutia to express a sceptical, negating consciousness. Now he attempts to separate Eliot again from the Contemporáneos in a difficult operation whereby a distance is opened up between Eliot and the 'hollow men' whom he has created yet condemns, while members of the Contemporáneos, such as Villaurrutia, are identified with, and held responsible

⁸ *Ruta*, 4, 4 (sept 1938); repr. in *PL*, 144.

⁹ 'We who were living are now dying / With a little patience' (*CPP*, 72).

for, the worlds of 'ausencia' and 'sueño' that they create.¹⁰ It is a wilful contrast and provides an example of a recurring pattern in Paz's prose whereby internal conflicts from his poems are externalized in the prose as Manichean oppositions.

Although Eliot is credited with the diagnosis of the Contemporáneos' failings, it is Pablo Neruda that is the repository for the virtues that they lack. Their 'hermosas refrigeradoras, máquinas de lo eterno' (PL, 144) become fluid process in Neruda:

No era la conciencia del mundo, era el mundo, la entraña, y la flor del mundo, dándose, creciendo en un espeso, insistente lenguaje de olas materiales, tiernas, tímidas, arrolladoras. (PL, 146)

As I have argued, in his poetic relations with Neruda, Paz remained attached to a 'conciencia del mundo' that allied him with the more structured vision of Villaurrutia, Cuesta, and Eliot. Yet in the current polemic, the vision of the Contemporáneos creates 'casas blandas y huecas, arteras como ellos'. Neruda offers a more emotionally blooded experience, displaying the 'angustia' (PL, 145) that was at the centre of Heidegger's account of human experience. Heidegger's 'nada' is then introduced as the counterpoint to the 'afirmación poética de Neruda' (PL, 149); yet it has become strangely politicized:

Con el fascismo, en España, la nada impersonal, subterránea, disgregadora, adquiere imagen, forma y acción semihumana [...] El gran drama metafísico del tiempo y la nada, agudizado en un instante tremendo y único, en un pedazo de historia, irreparable. Eso es España. (PL, 149-50)

This is the source of the contrast – Pablo Neruda as a poet prepared to support the Republican cause in the Civil War, and the Contemporáneos who were more reserved about political expression. The battle was then between a 'partidario de la vida, de España, contra la nada, contra la maldita caricatura que es el franquismo. Contra toda la cloaca subhumana de sus legiones y cómplices', and 'los silenciosos cómplices, los sin partido, más viles que los asesinos que destruyen España' (PL, 151).

The tone of 'Pablo Neruda en el corazón' becomes increasingly hectoring as it progresses. The violence of his attack has a parallel in the feelings that struggled for expression in *Entre la piedra y la flor*, and which eventually surfaced as a call for annihilation. The ferocity with which they are turned here on the Contemporáneos, with

¹⁰ Paz's satirical reading of *the Hollow Men* is shared by Hugh Kenner who declares that they 'epiphanize the flaccid forbearance of an upper-middleclass twentieth-century community, where no-one speaks loudly...', *The Invisible Poet*, 161-2.

whom he was meeting regularly, suggests the emotions at work transcend this specific polemic; they will find varied expression in response to the events of the ensuing years. Eliot remains in an ambiguous relationship to the *Contemporáneos* and to this debate over political commitment.

Ruta, the magazine in which 'Pablo Neruda en el corazón' appeared, was a Mexican periodical dedicated to the defence of culture and a 'lucha firme en contra de su más enconado enemigo: el fascismo internacional'.¹¹ No doubt Paz was writing to a brief, which allowed him to step outside the literary arena in which he felt considerable sympathies for, and owed considerable debts to, the *Contemporáneos*. Only a month earlier, in the different environment of *Sur*, Paz had published a sympathetic review of Xavier Villaurrutia's *Nostalgia de la muerte* that defended him against nationalist criticism as the first poet to express a 'conciencia mexicana', and which also contrasted his 'contenida dignidad' favourably with Neruda's 'poderosa corriente poética'.¹² *Taller* (1938-1941), the magazine that Paz founded with Rafael Solana, Efraín Huerta, and Alberto Quintero Álvarez, maintained links with the *Contemporáneos*. Xavier Villaurrutia, Jorge Cuesta, Carlos Pellicer, and Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano all contributed, as did other poets that I have considered in relation to Paz and T. S. Eliot – Juan Ramón Jiménez, Rafael Alberti, Pablo Neruda and Luis Cernuda. The magazine's stance of a leftist political commitment that insisted, nevertheless, on the autonomous claims of literature drew criticism from LEAR, which accused Paz, according to Guillermo Sheridan, of preferring 'corrientes secretas to condiciones objetivas'.¹³ This stance was indebted to *Hora de España*, and reinforced in 1939 when exiled members of the Republican magazine arrived in Mexico and were invited by Paz to join *Taller's* editorial board.

Paz published a form of manifesto for the new magazine in its second issue, titled 'Razón de ser'.¹⁴ The criticism of the *Contemporáneos* that he had unleashed in 'Ética del artista' and 'Pablo Neruda en el corazón' is now less insistent. He adopts Ortega y Gasset's 'teoría de las generaciones' (*PL*, 157) to present the battle of his own generation against its forebears as the result of an inevitable process rather than the enemy's personal deficiencies - Paz and his peers revise the inheritance of the

¹¹ 'Trayectoria de *Ruta*' (1938); repr. in Merlin Forster, *Index to Mexican Literary Periodicals* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1966), p. 15.

¹² 'Cultura de la muerte', *Sur*, 47 (agosto 1938); repr. in *PL*, 138 & 139.

¹³ 'Hora de Taller. Taller de España', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 529-530 (julio-agosto 1994), pp. 97-8.

¹⁴ *Taller*, 2 (abril 1939); repr. in *PL*, 157-62.

Contemporáneos just as they in turn had revised *modernismo*. He combines censure with admiration:

La inteligencia fue su mejor instrumento, pero jamás la usaron para penetrar lo real o construir lo ideal, sino para, ligeramente, fugarse de lo cotidiano [...] Detrás de esta irresponsabilidad había una gran conciencia de su propio papel; detrás de la alegría irrespetuosa y del *snobismo*, había disciplina, rigor; más allá de su huída intrascendente, una real preocupación por limitar fronteras y encontrar el residuo último de las cosas: pintura pura, arte puro, poesía pura. (PL, 159)

Although Paz denies them the status of revolutionaries ‘en el sentido radical, último, de la palabra’ (PL, 159), he nevertheless attempts to afford them some revolutionary credit, perhaps mindful of Alberti’s earlier advice: ‘La preocupación por un arte intelectual, sin concesiones sentimentales, ¿es nada más el ejercicio de un rigor revolucionario?’ (PL, 160).

The question is now, ‘¿Qué conquistaron ellos, qué podemos heredar nosotros?’ (PL, 160). Yet questions arise when Paz arrives at a description of the purpose that his generation wish to make that instrument serve:

Con la ciencia del arte, con el instrumento retórico del poema o de la prosa, hay que abrirse el pecho [...] Tenemos que conquistar, con nuestra angustia, una tierra viva y un hombre vivo. Tenemos que construir un orden humano, justo y nuestro. Por eso nosotros no heredamos sino una inquietud; un movimiento, no una inercia; un estímulo, no un modelo. (PL, 161-2)

It is difficult not to read the aggression of ‘abrirse el pecho’ as an attempt to lend vigour to a project which is otherwise vague. The value placed on ‘angustia’ recalls his praise of Pablo Neruda, who also provides a source for the criticism of the Contemporáneos that ‘jamás la usaron [la inteligencia] para penetrar lo real’. Yet, as I have argued, the materialist metaphysic that underpinned Neruda’s idea of penetrating reality was not rigorous enough for Paz the poet, even if it satisfies the prose writer. In fact, he seems happier here to describe his project in terms of the spurs that drive it – ‘una inquietud’, ‘un movimiento’, ‘un estímulo’ - rather than the ends towards which it is directed.

In his essay on *Taller* of 1983, Paz discussed ‘Razón de ser’ and an awareness that distinguished his peers from their predecessors:

Nuestra conciencia del tiempo que vivíamos era más viva y, ya que no más lúcida, sí más honda y total. El tiempo nos hacía una pregunta a la que había que responder si no queríamos perder la cara y el alma [...] Crecimos con la idea de

que viviámos una crisis general y mortal de la civilización, un fin del mundo.
(*Sombras*, 104)

The awareness that Paz describes here, of historical events pressing with a new insistence, was present in the original essay, which declared, ‘Nosotros estamos antes de la gran hecatombe próxima; ellos [los Contemporáneos] después’ (*PL*, 158). Paz explained in an interview for *El Nacional* of 1990 that during the 1930s Mexico experienced a new sensitivity to historical events elsewhere in the world: ‘Fue la primera vez que los acontecimientos del mundo afectaban la vida de México.’¹⁵ However, the question that history posed was yet another stimulus rather than a definitive project. *Taller* looked beyond the Contemporáneos and the materialism of Pablo Neruda, and found in Arthur Rimbaud and T. S. Eliot two exemplary responses.

Paz described the supplement that contained José Ferrel’s translation of Rimbaud’s *Une Saison en enfer* as ‘una definición’ and linked it to the theme of ‘history’ which is so important in his reading of Eliot:

Si una generación se define al escoger a sus antepasados, la publicación de Rimbaud en el número 4 de *Taller* fue una definición. Nuestra “modernidad” no era la de los “Contemporáneos” ni la de los poetas españoles de la Generación de 1927. Tampoco nos definía el “realismo social” (o socialista) que comenzaba en esos años ni lo que después se llamaría “poesía comprometida”. Nuestros afanes y preocupaciones eran confusos pero en su confusión misma [...] se dibujaba ya nuestro tema: poesía e historia. (*Sombras*, 98)

The introduction that Luis Cardoza y Aragón provided encourages connections with T. S. Eliot’s work. Like *The Waste Land*, and Pablo Neruda’s *Residencia en la tierra*, ‘Temporada de infierno’ is presented as a response to crisis, written ‘en la cima de un dolor’.¹⁶ Cardoza y Aragón also raises questions about the relationship between the Christian scheme that ‘infierno’ implies and Rimbaud’s own beliefs. Although his conclusion, that ‘nunca he encontrado ese tinte de satisfacción cristiana que se pretende percibir en él’ (‘Temporada’, 4), places Rimbaud in opposition to a post-conversion Eliot, it nevertheless maintains contact with Paz’s reading of *The Waste Land*.¹⁷ In ‘Crepúsculos de la ciudad’ and in other earlier poems, Paz uses Eliot to dramatize a situation in which available belief no longer applies to current experience. Both

¹⁵ Juan José Reyes and Fernando García Ramírez, ‘Entrevista con Octavio Paz: Itinerarios de un poeta’, *El Nacional* (supl. cultural), 29 noviembre 1990, p. 13.

¹⁶ ‘Temporada de infierno’, *Taller* (supl.), 4 (julio 1939), p. 3.

¹⁷ Cardoza y Aragón is probably referring to Paul Claudel whose discovery of Rimbaud’s poems in 1886 coincided with his own conversion.

Rimbaud's hell, and Eliot's purgatory are thus 'historical' in two different ways, both of which are distinct from historical events. They are historical to the extent that they place individual destiny within a broader scheme – hell and purgatory; they provide an interpretation of man in history. They also imply, however, by suggesting that the scheme of hell and purgatory no longer commands the assent which it once did, that the scheme itself is historical, a product of specific historical conditions which have now been superseded. As these new conditions have not produced alternative beliefs, Rimbaud's Hell is both fictive, a product of his belief - 'Me creo en el infierno, luego estoy en él' ('Temporada', 17) – and yet inescapable - 'La verdadera vida está ausente. No estamos en el mundo' (p. 21).

Rimbaud's response to a Christian scheme which is both intolerable and inescapable takes a variety of forms. There is rebellion – 'El culto a María, el enternecimiento para el crucificado despiertan en mí entre mil fantasías profanas' (p. 12) - but also scruple that his rebellion is futile: 'No puedo comprender la rebeldía; mi raza sólo se rebeló para saquear: como los lobos al animal que no han matado' (p. 12). There are even moments of willing capitulation:

Me ha nacido la razón. El mundo es bueno. Bendeciré la vida. Amaré a mis hermanos. Ya no son promesas infantiles. Ni la esperanza de escapar a la vejez y a la muerte. Dios me da mi fuerza y yo alabo a Dios. (p. 15)

Cardoza y Aragón describes the presence of something beyond these terms: 'Sus visiones prodigiosas, vertidas por necesidad que se diría fisiológica, nos demuestran la existencia de algo sobrehumano' (p. 5). However, as the vagueness of 'algo sobrehumano' implies, Rimbaud's declaration that 'voy a desvelar todos los misterios' (p. 18) remains a statement of intent. 'Temporada de infierno' concludes with an admission that the time is not propitious - 'Sí, la hora nueva es, por lo menos, muy severa' – yet also an injunction that 'hay que ser absolutamente moderno' (p. 37), that inhabiting the historical moment is in itself a moral obligation.

Paz described the selection of T. S. Eliot's poems that appeared in a supplement to *Taller* in 1940 as a companion to the Rimbaud:

La publicación de Eliot tuvo la misma significación que la de Rimbaud; nuestra "modernidad", quiero decir, nuestra visión de la poesía moderna – sobre todo: de la poesía *en y ante* el mundo moderno – era radicalmente distinta a la de la generación anterior. *Tierra baldía* me pareció – lo sigo creyendo – como la visión y la versión cristiana y tradicionalista de la realidad que, cincuenta años antes, con

lenguaje entrecortado y extrañamente contemporáneo, había descrito Rimbaud. El tema de los dos poetas – nuestro tema – es el mundo moderno. Más exactamente: nosotros (yo, tú, él, ella) en el mundo moderno. Rimbaud lo llamó *infierno* y Eliot *purgatorio*: ¿qué importa el nombre? No es un lugar fuera del mundo ni está en las entrañas de la Tierra; tampoco es una entidad metafísica o un estado psicológico: es una realidad histórica y así incluye a la psicología y la metafísica, al aquí y al allá. Es una ciudad, muchas ciudades. Es el teatro del progreso, un lugar en el que, como decía Lull del infierno, la pena es circular. (*Sombras*, 101-2)

Paz's care over prepositions in his description of a 'poesía *en* y *ante* el mundo moderno' recalls the double injunction of 'Ética' for a poetry that would not only be a product of its historical period but also a response to it. Both Rimbaud's rebellion, and Eliot's 'versión cristiana y tradicionalista' lay claim to this status '*ante*'. Yet Paz is less fastidious in exploring the consequences of attaching the label 'cristiana y tradicionalista' to Eliot while leaving Rimbaud free of it. If Eliot's purgatory is part of a Christian vision, then it will resist, as Rimbaud does not, Paz's attempt to subordinate its metaphysical to its historical dimension - 'es una realidad histórica y así incluye a la psicología y la metafísica, al aquí y al allá'. Paz admires both poets for employing related parts – hell and purgatory – of a single Christian scheme to represent suffering in the modern world. This is the first aspect of their historical relevance, which I outlined above. The second aspect, however, which depends upon an awareness that this scheme is itself historically placed, and so questioned, is denied. Rimbaud's hell and Eliot's purgatory are unproblematic vehicles for the representation of a historical moment. Yet Rimbaud is highly ambivalent about the scheme he employs, and Eliot too, in *The Waste Land* at least, leaves the extent and efficacy of the Christian scheme uncertain. Paz employs this Eliot increasingly in the late 1930s and beyond in poems such as 'Atrás tierra o cielo', which does not 'incluye [...] al aquí y al allá' but rejects them both. Paz's prose statement lacks the consciousness of his poems, which are more aware of the processes, and doubtful of the sources, by which they construct their meaning. Eliot provides a consistent problem for Paz as a figure who embodies a specific belief to which Paz is not sympathetic while providing a poetic model that is more ambiguous. Like Rimbaud, and other modern poets such as the Neruda of *Residencia en la tierra*, Eliot supports multiple interpretations.

Marjorie Perloff, for whom Rimbaud and Eliot embody distinct traditions in modern poetry, would be surprised by Paz's reading of the two poets:

What we loosely call “Modernism” in Anglo-American poetry is really made up of two separate though often interwoven strands: the Symbolist mode that Lowell inherited from Eliot and Baudelaire and, beyond them, from the great Romantic poets, and the “anti-Symbolist” mode of indeterminacy or “undecidability”, of literalness and free play, whose first real exemplar was the Rimbaud of the *Illuminations*.¹⁸

Paz’s interpretation of Rimbaud’s Hell as a depiction of modern experience is more determinate than this scheme would allow, just as the Eliot that he uses in his poems is more evasive than the ‘perfectly coherent symbolic structure’ that Perloff describes (p. 13). Perloff’s reading of Eliot seems motivated by the need for a foil to her interpretation of Rimbaud. Her project to define two separate modern traditions does not fit comfortably into the terms of the present study. Perloff wishes to portray poems as in themselves either determinate or indeterminate. However, as Paz’s reading of Rimbaud and Eliot suggests, the inherent characteristics of a poem are only part of an existence which is realized through determinate, if often provisional, interpretations. Certainly, any poem that one describes as experimental, and I include *The Waste Land* in this company with *Une Saison en enfer*, will necessarily, since it distorts the conventions of its medium, create ambiguities, and will thus be amenable to objective description as indeterminate; but this is not the end of its life. Perloff cites the Rimbaud of *Une Saison en enfer*: ‘I flattered myself on inventing, some day, a poetic language accessible to all the senses. I withheld the translation’ (p. 45). Yet if he has withheld the translation that does not disqualify others from providing their own. This is the process of influence by which Paz creates his own poetic language from his readings of other poets. Nevertheless, the distinction which underpins Perloff’s scheme, between a tendency to arrest and a tendency to generate meaning, is a serviceable one. It is difficult to avoid judgements about the degree to which a writer has either explored or foreclosed the potential for meaning in a precursor. I have observed a tendency in Paz’s own early works - in the call of ‘Ética’ for an ‘arte de tesis’ and in the search for a ‘metafísica’ that Jorge Cuesta noted in *Raíz del hombre* - to fix a determined meaning on the ambiguity of experimental literary forms.

Although Paz describes the *Taller* Eliot anthology as a publication that defined his own generation, it was largely produced by members of the Contemporáneos and

¹⁸ *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. vii. Although Perloff refers here to the *Illuminations*, she quotes from Rimbaud’s later work as an example of ‘the “anti-Symbolist” mode of indeterminacy’ on p. 45.

figures associated with them. Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano compiled and introduced the selection as well as featuring in the list of translators, which included Octavio G. Barreda, León Felipe, Rodolfo Usigli and Juan Ramón Jiménez. Nevertheless, Paz, who was general editor of *Taller* at the time,¹⁹ clearly felt attached to the anthology and described it as ‘la primera que se publicó en castellano’, adding that ‘sigue siendo, para mi gusto, la mejor’ (*Sombras*, 101). In ‘Rescate de Enrique Manguía’ he digresses from his subject, whose own translation of *The Waste Land* the anthology passed over in favour of Ángel Flores, to defend the *Taller* selection from various misconceptions – ‘pongo las cosas en su sitio’ (‘REM’, 42). In this discussion, the anthology does not represent his own generation, but Mexican literary culture compared to the Spanish. He criticizes a more recent José María Valverde translation, ‘empedrada de españolismos y madrileñismos que convierten a Eliot en un poeta castizo de la Puerta del Sol’ (‘REM’, 42), and corrects a mistaken opinion that the Catalan Augustí Bartra’s translations were more popular in Mexico than the *Taller* selection. He also points out that Ortiz de Montellano wrote Eliot to ask for permission to publish the anthology, and rather touchily adds, ‘Cuento esto para que se vea cómo, a pesar de la escasez de recursos y de la soledad en que vivíamos, los escritores mexicanos no desconocíamos las reglas de la propiedad intelectual’ (‘REM’, 42).²⁰ One gets a strong sense of the prestige that Eliot has enjoyed in the Hispanic world, and that Paz felt insecure about his own right, as a Mexican, and perhaps as an individual within Mexico, to inherit some of that prestige.

In the Manguía essay, Paz praises ‘la inteligente nota de introducción’ that Ortiz de Montellano provided for the selection (‘REM’, 42). The introduction suggests that if Paz had softened his polemic against his forebears in ‘Razón de ser’, the Contemporáneos themselves were changing in ways that brought them closer to the younger generation. For Ortiz de Montellano,

representativo de la cultura y de las inquietudes de nuestra época, T. S. Eliot encarna un límite y una certidumbre para las interrogaciones del espíritu.²¹

¹⁹ See Forster, 16.

²⁰ There is no record of this correspondence at Faber and Faber. A letter from T. S. Eliot acknowledging receipt of the 1946 book edition of *Miércoles de ceniza* is reproduced in Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano, *Epistolario* (México: UNAM, 1999), p. 312. Eliot declares: ‘The translation appears to me good. I cannot profess to have enough knowledge of your language to be able to judge either accuracy of translation or perfection of style, but I read with much pleasure your introduction which seemed to me, if I may say so, very perceptive.’ Ortiz de Montellano may have initially gained permission from Eliot via Dudley Fitts. For Fitts’s detailed comments on early drafts of the translation see *Epistolario*, 316-23.

²¹ ‘T. S. Eliot: Poemas’. *Taller*, (suplemento), 2, 10 (marzo-abril de 1940), p. 63.

As a representative of ‘las inquietudes de nuestra época’, Eliot is credited with the historical consciousness that Paz describes as a characteristic of his own contemporaries, and the introduction brings *The Waste Land* into the company of Rilke’s *Elegies*, and St.-John Perse’s *Anabase* as poems that ‘señalan la crisis de la conciencia poética contemporánea’ (‘Poemas’, 63).²² The phrase ‘las interrogaciones del espíritu’ also echoes the non-denominational, and frequently vague, concern with the spiritual that Paz shared with his peers, and which Cardoza y Aragón signalled in Rimbaud as ‘algo sobrehumano’. ‘Ética del artista’ had called for a poetry that was ‘mística’ y combativa’, a phrase that Ortiz de Montellano now echoes as he rejects the ‘classicism’ and ‘romanticism’ that his own peers, Villaurrutia and Cuesta, favoured: ‘La poesía moderna no es romántica o clásica, es *poesía y mística*’ (‘Poemas’, 64). The earlier rhetoric of purism that Paz had opposed is still present nevertheless. Eliot is praised, in a phrase that recalls Valéry, for the ‘rigor de sus métodos’ (‘Poemas’, 63), and ‘puro’ is asked, as it frequently was in *Contemporáneos*, to carry a heavy freight of meaning: ‘se sirve de las palabras en su más puro valor’ (‘Poemas’, 63). Yet this language consciousness, which was such a fundamental aspect of the group’s ‘artepurismo’, begins to take on a Pazian colouring. Eliot’s language and prosody

completan el prodigio de un arte nuevo, difícil, complicado y, sin embargo, primordial en que la palabra vuelve a la pureza del origen o a la magia de la plegaria sin perder su cultivo precioso y refinado, posterior al “Simbolismo”. (‘Poemas’, 64)

In an essay of 1954, Paz defined *Taller*’s own project as a ‘búsqueda de la palabra “original”’ (Pérez, 56).²³ The anthology therefore provides a potential meeting point for the *Contemporáneos*’ concern with language and artistic form, and Paz’s own more politically oriented awareness.

The selection itself was a fairly comprehensive gathering of the translations of T. S. Eliot available in Spanish in the late 1930s. The most notable omission was Julio

²² The publication, in Guillermo Sheridan’s edition of José Gorostiza’s *Poesía completa* (México: FCE, 1996), of the notes that Gorostiza made for a poem called ‘El semejante’ indicate that after *Muerte sin fin* (1939) this central member of the *Contemporáneos* was also shifting from ‘la poesía de la especulación íntima y abstracta’ to ‘una poética de la intimidad alterada por la realidad social e histórica concreta’ as a direct response to Eliot’s *Waste Land* (p. 14).

²³ Paz attempts, in fact, to wrest the language-consciousness of the *Contemporáneos* from them: ‘Los problemas técnicos – quiero decir: el lenguaje – constituyeron una de nuestras preocupaciones centrales. Pero jamás vimos la palabra como “medio de expresión”. Y esto – nuestra repugnancia por lo literario y nuestra búsqueda de la palabra “original”, por oposición a la palabra “personal” – distingue a mi generación de la de “Contemporáneos”’ (Pérez, 56).

Irazusta's translation of 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', which had appeared in *Sur* a year and a half before Ortiz de Montellano's version of *Ash Wednesday*. Perhaps there was a political reason for its exclusion as Irazusta was engaged in a Hispanic version of Eliot's attack on liberalism. John King, in his history of *Sur*, recounts that

the Irazusta brothers, Ernesto Palacio and Ramón Doll directed an attack on liberalism as a movement which had allowed traditional, clerical, Hispanic and colonial values to be eroded.²⁴

Neither Ortiz de Montellano nor the editors of *Taller* would have wanted to foreground this link between Eliot's Conservatism and Spanish *casticismo*, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the Falangist victory in the Civil War.

The majority of the selection's contents would already have been familiar to Paz: he would by this time have possessed the Ángel Flores verse translation of *The Waste Land*, which is preferred to Enrique Manguía Jr.'s prose version, while León Felipe's 'Los hombres huecos' had appeared in *Contemporáneos*, Usigli's 'Prufrock' in *Poesía*, a Mexican forerunner of *Taller*, and Ortiz de Montellano's 'Miércoles de ceniza' in *Sur*. However, the versions of 'A Song for Simeon' by Octavio G. Barreda, and 'La Figlia Che Piange' and *Marina* by Juan Ramón Jiménez were appearing in Latin America for the first time.²⁵

Paz never discussed these three later translations in any great detail. In his essay on Enrique Manguía, he describes the version of 'A Song for Simeon' as 'correcta' ('REM', 42), and in an interview refers to Barreda's 'trabajos excelentes' on Eliot (PC, 22).²⁶ Nevertheless, the fact that the Mexican translator of St.-John Perse's *Anabase* had turned to Eliot must have confirmed the connection that Paz made between the two poets. 'Un canto para Simeon' also provides an indication of the specific character that Eliot's conversion to the Anglican Church took: 'No para mí la última visión', Simeon declares ('Poemas', 91). The territory that the *Ariel Poems* inhabit, in search, rather than in receipt, of grace, is still comprehensible in human rather than otherworldly terms, and

²⁴ *Sur: A Study of the Argentine Literary Journal and its Role in the Development of a Culture 1931-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 73. Like Eliot, Julio Irazusta also 'approved of the writings of Charles Maurras and the activities of the Action Française' (p. 74).

²⁵ The two translations by Juan Ramón Jiménez had first appeared, along with a section of *Ash-Wednesday*, in *La Gaceta Literaria*, Madrid (15 febrero 1931), 3.

²⁶ The other 'trabajo' was a translation of Eliot's essay, 'The Music of Poetry', which appeared in *El Hijo Pródigo*, 1, 1 (15 abril 1943).

so it is accessible to the kind of reading that Paz and Cardoza y Aragón were making of Rimbaud.

For William Empson, *Marina* was one of Eliot's finest expressions of 'the balance maintained between otherworldliness and humanism' (*Argufying*, 356). Juan Ramón Jiménez also praised Eliot for his rootedness in this world, although in contrast to a Parnassian ideal of form rather than otherworldliness:

No, no es una estatua de alabastro ni mármol; Eliot es un hombre que se va convirtiendo a sí mismo por una ruda elaboración en tierra, en terrón, y adhiriéndose a la roca.²⁷

While these issues are at play in Paz's reading of Eliot, Juan Ramón Jiménez's prose versions of *Marina* and 'La Figlia Che Piange' seem to have excited only limited enthusiasm. Paz politely observed that 'aunque en prosa y con pequeños errores [...] merecen retenerse' ('REM', 42). The discordant note that 'As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised' introduces to the artfully concocted scene of 'La Figlia Che Piange' can be read as an attack on one aspect of *modernista* verse. Jiménez clearly read Eliot as an anti-Parnassian, and his own *Eternidades* were a pivotal rebellion for the Mexicans against the confections of *modernismo*. The moon of 'Rapsodia de una noche ventosa' – 'Unas borradas viruelas agrietan su cara' – would already have placed Eliot within this polemic that an early poem like Paz's 'Desde el principio', with its reference to 'lunas estranguladas', engaged in.²⁸ This was a realist Eliot rather than a 'purist' or a 'committed' Eliot. Nevertheless, an earlier generation had waged this struggle against a particular *modernista* eloquence; it was not a central preoccupation for Paz during the *Taller* years.

Rodolfo Usigli's 'El canto de amor de J. Alfred Prufrock' elicited more enthusiasm from Paz:

Entre las versiones que recogió Ortiz de Montellano hay algunas que son admirables. Pienso sobre todo en la de *El canto de amor de J. A. Prufrock* de Rodolfo Usigli. Gracias a Rodolfo ese intenso poema inglés también es un poema, no menos intenso, en nuestra lengua. ('REM', 42)²⁹

²⁷ *Prosas críticas* (Madrid: Taurus, 1981), p. 326.

²⁸ 'Rapsodia de una noche ventosa'. *Sur*, 29 (febrero de 1937), p. 45; 'Desde el principio', *Cuadernos del Valle de México*, 1 (septiembre 1933), p. 12.

²⁹ Paz recounts that Usigli did actually meet Eliot, although no correspondence is held at Faber and Faber: 'En Londres [...] había sido recibido con gran cordialidad y simpatía por Bernard Shaw y por T. S. Eliot, un reconocimiento que provocó, entre sus colegas mexicanos, la conocida reacción de envidia silenciosa' (*ALP*, 48).

I have already discussed the connections that Judith Myers Hoover draws between the cityscapes of 'Prufrock' and Paz's 'Crepúsculos de la ciudad'. I also considered the affinity that Paz perceived between '¡Querido Rodolfo, a un tiempo pueril y teatral!' (*AIP*, 51) and Prufrock himself, and suggested a parallel between Prufrock's vacillation and the lack of explicit political commitment in the poems of the Contemporáneos. 'Prufrock' dates from Eliot's early enthusiasm for Laforgue, and in an earlier chapter I discussed the importance of Ramón López Velarde, himself an inheritor of Laforgue, as a precursor for Eliot in Mexico. In 'El retorno maléfico', López Velarde employs the rhyming couplet for effects of ironic counterpoint – 'al edén subvertido que se calla / en la mutilación de la metralla' (*Obras*, 206) – which can be traced to Laforgue and which has its equivalent in 'Prufrock'. However, Usigli's version of Eliot's poem does without the rhyming couplet. Thus,

Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo. (*CP*, 13)

becomes,

Oh, no preguntes "¿Qué es?"
Vayámonos a hacer nuestra visita.

En la pieza las mujeres vienen y van
hablando de Miguel Angel. ('Poemas', 65-6)

The humour is gone, leaving an effect that is, I think, much bleaker. The ending of the poem is particularly desolate once the couplet – 'By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown / Till human voices wake us, and we drown.' (*CP*, 17) – is deserted for a different form of conclusion:

al lado de muchachas marinas coronadas de algas marinas rojas y cafés
hasta que nos despiertan voces humanas y nos ahogamos. ('Poemas', 69)

Not only is the tidiness of the couplet lost, but Usigli inserts a space before the final line which, thus isolated, gains a starker poignancy.

The couplet, and the frequently humorous use to which Eliot puts it in 'Prufrock', brings a sense of speakerly control; the reader is aware of a persona's presence, that the world his words present is a world of his perceiving. Take that away and words start to take on a life of their own. The rhythmical even temper of largely monosyllabic verbs in 'But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed' (*CPP*, 15) adopts a different character:

pero aunque he llorado y ayunado, llorado y orado ('Poemas', 68)

The repeated '-ado' of 'llorado y ayunado' burgeons to become a repeated '-orado' in 'llorado' y 'orado'. That a component of a word – 'orado' – should break off to become a word in its own right is slightly unnerving. 'Wept and prayed' gently closes the Eliot line, but Usigli's seems to grow with its own verbal generative force. The effect is closer to the litany of 'The water-dripping song' in 'What the Thunder Said', to the word-play of *Ash-Wednesday*, and to Xavier Villaurrutia's poems, than to Eliot's own 'Prufrock'.

The other recent translation that Paz singles out for praise in the *Antología* is Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano's version of *Ash-Wednesday*, which concluded the selection:³⁰

Una traducción memorable [...] es la de Ortiz de Montellano: *Miércoles de ceniza*. No es inferior a la de Usigli aunque, como poema, yo prefiero *El canto de amor* a *Miércoles de ceniza*. ('REM', 42)

Paz's coolness towards the poem itself is most readily explained by its overtly Christian theme. Eliot described *Ash-Wednesday* in a letter to his confessor, William Force Stead, as an attempt to represent 'the experience of man in search of God, and trying to explain to himself his intenser human feelings in terms of the divine goal'.³¹ In spite of Paz's enthusiasm for a Rimbaud who was presented in search of 'un algo sobrehumano', there was no room in his scheme for 'the divine goal'. Yet Antonio Marichalar's introduction to 'Lancelot Andrews' [*sic*] in *Cruz y Raya* had managed to attenuate God's presence in Eliot's poem, describing it as 'una lírica metafísica'. It is this vocabulary that Paz

³⁰ Torres Bodet wrote Ortiz de Montellano on 1 July 1940 to point out that his version of 'A Song for Simeon', as one of the *Ariel Poems*, should appear after *Ash-Wednesday* (Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano, *Epistolario* [México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1999], p. 168), but by this time the selection had already been published. 'Miércoles de ceniza' gains from the error, appearing as the conclusion to a period of Eliot's career.

³¹ 9 August 1930; quoted in Ronald Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 151.

employs when, in 'Poesía e historia (*Laurel y nosotros*)' (1982), he describes Ortiz de Montellano's attraction to Eliot:

Ortiz de Montellano intentó fundir onirismo y mexicanismo. Temperamento reflexivo e intelectual, se inclinó después hacia el extremo opuesto y sus preocupaciones metafísicas lo acercaron a la poesía de Eliot. (*Sombras*, 79)

'Preocupaciones metafísicas' employs the same vocabulary that Jorge Cuesta used to describe Paz's own poems, and it also recalls the injunction of 'Ética' for non-specific beliefs whether 'religiosos, políticos o simplemente doctrinarios' (*PL*, 115). Paz had attacked the Contemporáneos for disregarding the belief-content of poems, yet 'preocupaciones metafísicas' had always been a part of Ortiz de Montellano's scheme. In what amounted to a personal manifesto, 'Notas de un lector de poesía', he attempted to find common ground between Valéry and the surrealists. Thus Valéry's awareness of language - 'el instrumento siempre impreciso pero consciente de las palabras' - becomes wedded to a further purpose - the illumination of 'la zona oscura de adumbración interior'.³² The poem has a goal that lies beyond 'su técnica propia' as it 'hurga en el misterio más allá de la realidad conocida' (p. 94). This is just the dimension of poetry that 'Ética del artista' found absent in the work of the Contemporáneos, and which Paz called on a new generation to provide in 'Razón de ser'.

Paz drew a picture in which he was caught between a Contemporáneos who wrote a poetry with no beliefs, and an Eliot whose beliefs were directed towards a 'divine goal' to which he could not subscribe. Nevertheless, he found ways of accommodating these different influences to his own preoccupations:

Durante el primer tercio del siglo, la vertiente romántica de esta preocupación universal por la muerte fueron Dadá, el surrealismo y sus ramificaciones en casi todo el mundo y especialmente en Hispanoamérica y España. La vertiente opuesta, aunque no menos poseída por la conciencia de la fragilidad de los hombres y sus obras, fue la poesía de lengua inglesa. Pienso sobre todo en Eliot y en poemas como *Miércoles de ceniza*. El centro de esta vasta meditación sobre la muerte fue Alemania y sus figuras más notables Rilke y Heidegger. El pensamiento y la poesía de nuestra lengua no fueron insensibles a tantos estímulos. (*Vill*, 73)

God is taken out of Eliot's purpose so that *Ash-Wednesday* can be read as one voice in a collective meditation on death that includes Heidegger and Rilke. Paz repeatedly

³² *Contemporáneos*, 26-27 (julio-agosto 1930), p. 92.

attempts to salvage a secular metaphysical preoccupation in this way from Eliot's committed religious belief. This passage is prompted by a discussion of death in the work of Xavier Villaurrutia. In his review of *Nostalgia de la muerte* of 1938, Paz had described death in Villaurrutia, as in Rilke, as 'una vivencia, anterior a todo conocer' (PL, 140), and Villaurrutia apparently described Heidegger as 'mi filósofo' (Vill, 68). In spite of his preference for 'Prufrock' ahead of *Ash-Wednesday*, Paz was clearly still determined to bring the post-conversion poem into a meaningful relationship with his other reading.

Paz reads *Ash-Wednesday* through the Contemporáneos as a means of secularizing its content, but the syntactic form of the poem would also have been familiar through the poems of Villaurrutia. What B. C. Southam describes as the 'accretive style' (p. 222) of *Ash-Wednesday*, and which he attributes to the sermons of Lancelot Andrewes, José Gorostiza describes as 'el desdoblamiento de los términos de una oración' in Xavier Villaurrutia's poems of the late 1930s (*Prosa*, 173). *Miércoles de ceniza* opens:

Porque no espero una vez más volver
 Porque no espero
 Porque no espero una vez más
 deseando el don de éste y el designio de aquél...

Villaurrutia's 'Nocturno' of 1939 provides an example of a similar structure:

Todo lo que la noche
 dibuja con la mano
 de sombra [...]

 Todo lo que la sombra [...]

 Todo lo que el silencio [...]

 ¡Todo!
 circula en cada rama
 del árbol de mis venas,
 acaricia mis muslos,
 inunda mis oídos, vive en mis ojos muertos,
 muere en mis labios duros.³³

³³ *Obras*, 44-5.

'Nocturno rosa' and 'Nocturno mar' provide similar examples. Paz had written an admiring review of *Nostalgia de la muerte*, in which these poems appeared and, as I have demonstrated, he read *Ash-Wednesday* in conjunction with Villaurrutia, Rilke and Heidegger as a poem about death. Villaurrutia may himself have been influenced by the poem, either in English or in Ortiz de Montellano's translation, which first appeared in 1938. The influence could be even earlier than this. I noted the presence of an 'accretive style' in the 'Nocturno' that appeared in *Barandal* in 1931, and Manuel Durán, in a note on León Felipe's 'Los hombres huecos', sees a link between the ritual form of the final section of *The Hollow Men* and Xavier Villaurrutia:

Las frases transcendentales y rituales ("porque tuyo es el reino") quedan envueltas en la sombra y la angustia del mundo contemporáneo: Eliot y Villaurrutia se dan la mano.³⁴

It is extremely difficult to make certain assessments of where these influences lay and when they occurred since, as I have observed, an awareness of liturgical form can be taken for granted in any Spanish or Spanish American poet. Even as unlikely a source as Pablo Neruda's *Residencia en la tierra*, recalls the 'accretive style' of litany in its preference for list and reiteration.³⁵ Paz's own *Raíz del hombre* adopted some of Neruda's tendency towards incantation, and the rhythms of his poems of the 1960s such as *Blanco* have a strong ritual character. *Ash-Wednesday*'s marriage of symbolist incantation and Christian ritual found a sympathetic home in Spanish America.³⁶

There is much that Paz could have learnt from *Ash-Wednesday*, and some of its syntactic structure surfaces in later poems such as 'La sombra', which I will discuss in my next chapter. Nevertheless, even if the poem is read in its purely formal aspect, the fact of Eliot's conversion to the Anglican Church cannot be fully excised. Add to this an awareness of his 'reactionary' political reputation, evident in a letter from Ortiz de Montellano which defends *Ash-Wednesday* against the charge that it is 'un poema doctrinario y fascista' (*Epistolario*, 138), and Eliot becomes a difficult writer for Paz to

³⁴ *Antología de la revista Contemporáneos*, 55n.

³⁵ Robert Pring-Mill argues convincingly for the presence of litany in Neruda's later *Las alturas de Macchu Picchu*: '... and in IX, a solemn and incantatory chant made up of units based on interlocking metaphors, with the phrase *de piedra* ('of stone') recurring like the 'Ora pro nobis' of a litany, building up to a final pair of lines which brings us starkly back both to the great mass of men who raised the citadel and to the one-way thrust of man-slaying time', 'Preface' to *Pablo Neruda: The Heights of Macchu Picchu*, trans. by Nathaniel Tarn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966), p. 12.

³⁶ In his introduction to the 1946 reprint of *Miércoles de ceniza* in book form (México: Espiga), Ortiz de Montellano suggested a natural affinity between the Catholic culture of Latin American and Eliot's poems, suggesting that 'la cultura latina florece a cada paso en su obra' (p. 7).

assimilate. Although the Eliot *Antología* was a defining publication for the *Taller* group, Paz concedes that Eliot's beliefs still provided a barrier:

En lengua inglesa Pound y Eliot habían logrado insertar a la poesía en la historia moderna. Podríamos habernos inspirado en ellos pero sus ideas, valores y creencias eran precisamente los opuestos a los nuestros. Sólo unos años más tarde – no tengo más remedio que acudir a mi caso personal – pude seguirlos por ese camino, aunque en dirección opuesta. (*Sombras*, 107)

Those 'unos años más tarde' were not so far away – the years 1944-45 that Paz spent in the United States. For the moment, the 'ideas, valores y creencias' of his peers, which stood in the way of Eliot and Pound, were feeling the pressure of historical events. The Mexican left, whose own revolution had partly coincided with the rise of the Bolsheviks, had maintained close relations with the Soviet Union. An article in one of Paz's own magazines, *Cuadernos del Valle de México*, had in 1933 described 'el ejemplo soviético como la única salida a la historia'.³⁷ Yet Paz's encounters in Spain with members of the orthodox, Soviet left, with their condemnation of André Gide at the congress, and their general vilification of Trotsky, cooled his attitude towards them. Back in Mexico, Paz left the magazine *Futuro* over what he described as their 'sofismo despreciable' on Trotsky (*It*, 67). Then on 23 August 1939 the Hitler-Stalin Pact was agreed. Paz was appalled at the behaviour of friends who sought to justify Stalin's action and he left the workers' newspaper *El Popular* as a result. The first attempt on Leon Trotsky's life came on 24 May 1940, led by David Siqueiros who had been a friend of Paz's, and who was now ghosted out of the country to Chile with Pablo Neruda's help; and then on 20 August 1940, with Europe at war, Trotsky was assassinated.³⁸

The last issue of *Taller* was dated January-February 1941. When he came to explain the reasons for its disappearance, Paz concluded that lack of funding was a decisive factor, yet political events had also left its participators 'cansados, desilusionados y divididos' (*Sombras*, 110). *Taller* had attempted to defend 'la libertad del arte y de la poesía', but politics were inescapable. Although *Taller* was not a political publication like *Futuro* and *El Popular*, political allegiances still underpinned it. The translation of Rimbaud, for example, which served as a 'definition' for the magazine, had been produced by José Ferrel, a committed communist. Paz could not

³⁷ 'Apuntes para un ensayo sobre el significado universal de la Unión Soviética', 8.

³⁸ Paz recalls these events in *It*, 57-75.

separate his sense of a political impasse from his literary relationships, as his worsening relations with Pablo Neruda confirmed.

Pablo Neruda was Chilean ambassador to Mexico during this period, and Paz maintained a close friendship with him after they had met in Spain. Several incidents occurred, however, to sour their relationship. Neruda contributed an article to *Taller* that referred scathingly to 'el mueble juanramonesco con patas de libro' which Paz was reluctant to publish since Jiménez was himself a contributor to the magazine.³⁹ One evening Paz defended the *poetas puros*, such as Villaurrutia, and the Trotskyists against 'los mismos términos de oprobio' that Neruda was now raining on the two groups – 'me miró con asombro, casi con incredulidad, y después me respondió con dureza' (*Sombras*, 53). In 'Poesía e historia' Paz recounts the dinner held in Mexico City a few days later in Pablo Neruda's honour. Neruda made a remark on Paz's shirt – "más limpia", agregó, "que tu conciencia" (*Sombras*, 55). A scuffle ensued and Paz was ushered away by Enrique González Martínez, who took Paz and his companions to a fashionable nightclub where they drank champagne into the night, González Martínez cheerfully reciting poems. There is a strong symbolic undercurrent to the anecdote – as Paz falls out with Neruda over politics he is embraced by the aged late-modernista who had mourned the willow that weeps by the lake as a bullet fizzed through his window. There is a world beyond Neruda, he seems to suggest. Yet Paz was hurt, and when Neruda eventually left Mexico City he published a bitter attack on Neruda's vanity and cronyism.⁴⁰

Political events had closed in on Mexican literary life at the turn of the 1930s and 40s. Paz now found himself stranded from the broadly leftist base that had given him a measure of distance from the Contemporáneos. Looking back in 1954, he declared that 'el grupo se desgarró. Nosotros mismos, por dentro, estamos desgarrados' (*Peras*, 58). He was not alone in feeling that politics had brought literature to an impasse. John King describes a similar situation in the Argentine periodical *Sur*, to which Paz contributed, as opposition between the left and right hardened, and a political third way seemed less and less viable. The sense of urgency is clear in a note by Jorge Luis Borges:

Escribo en julio de 1940: cada mañana la realidad se parece más a una pesadilla.
Sólo es posible la lectura de páginas que no aluden siquiera a la realidad: fantasías

³⁹ 'Versos de Sara de Ibañez', *Taller*, 12 (enero-febrero 1941), p. 34.

⁴⁰ 'Respuesta a un cónsul', *Letras de México*, 4, 8 (15 August 1943), 5.

cosmogónicas de Olaf Stapledon, obras de teología o de metafísica, discusiones verbales, problemas frívolos de Queen o de Nicolas Blake.⁴¹

As King describes it, 'in a world going mad, the intellectual response could only be a radical form of askesis, enjoying the plots of literature, but denying order to anything other than the autonomous sphere of literature' (p. 93). Thus 'purism' attains a new currency as in fact the only honest response to a political reality that quite literally defies description; and Valéry gains a new dignity, not as a representative of 'purism' so much as

un hombre que, en un siglo que adora los caóticos ídolos de la sangre, de la tierra y de la pasión, prefirió siempre los lúcidos placeres del pensamiento y las secretas aventuras del orden.⁴²

Yet this is a retreat from 'los caóticos ídolos de la sangre' not a response that challenges them. In 1937 Borges had proposed Eliot among others as an example of 'el buen europeo [...] que se sabe heredero y continuador de todos los países', which could serve as an antidote to German nationalism.⁴³ Yet again, this fails to answer fascist ideology with an equally articulate belief. Borges characterizes a general weakness of the magazine that King identifies: '*Sur* defended value but never defined it' (p. 76). This was not a problem for *Sur* alone, however; the political events that led to the Second World War challenged writers in Europe and Spanish America alike. In his own dignified assessment of events in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Eliot described being 'deeply shaken by the events of September 1938, in a way from which one does not recover':

The feeling which was new and unexpected was a feeling of humiliation, which seemed to demand an act of personal contrition, of humility, repentance and amendment; what had happened was something in which one was deeply implicated and responsible. It was not, I repeat, a criticism of the government, but a doubt of the validity of a civilisation. We could not match conviction with conviction, we had no ideas with which we could either meet or oppose the ideas opposed to us.⁴⁴

⁴¹ 'Ellery Queen: The New Adventures of Ellery Queen', *Sur*, 70 (julio 1940), p. 62.

⁴² Borges, 'Valéry como símbolo', *Sur*, 132 (October 1945), p. 32.

⁴³ 'De regreso', *Sur*, 38 (noviembre 1937), p. 93.

⁴⁴ *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), p. 64.

Eliot's reference to 'contrition' has its equivalent in Paz's own talk of 'una falla moral' and 'abdicación' in his discussion of *Taller* (*Sombras*, 110-11). Eliot lamented that his own society amounted to little more than 'a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries' (p. 64), a reminder that Eliot's Conservatism, in economics at least, was not so far removed from the leftist Paz.⁴⁵ Yet both found themselves in a situation in which they 'had no ideas with which' they 'could either meet or oppose the ideas opposed' to them; and neither was willing to take the Borges route into 'purism', or formalism. *The Idea of a Christian Society* was Eliot's response to events, borne from a belief that something now had to change. As an article he contributed to the *Christian Newsletter* put it: 'The new order cannot be based on the preservation of privilege, whether the privilege of a country, of a class, or of an individual.'⁴⁶ Readers in England clearly agreed: when *The Idea of a Christian Society* was published in 1939, just after the outbreak of war, it went through three impressions in as many months. It struck a chord in Spanish America as well and was published, in a translation by Carlos M. Reyles, simultaneously in Buenos Aires and Mexico City in 1942; it was the first of Eliot's prose to be published in book form in Spanish.

Paz never mentioned *La idea de una sociedad cristiana*, although it must have been discussed when it was published in Mexico City. As he looked back on the political beliefs of the *Taller* group he did feel, however, that a new start had been anticipated, and that much of what had appeared to be leftist thinking had a strong religious character:

Sería un error creer que el pensamiento marxista inspiraba nuestras actitudes. Lo que nos encendía era el prestigio mágico de la palabra revolución. Éramos neófitos de la moderna y confusa religión de la historia [...] Veíamos los sucesos de cada día – fútiles, atroces, risibles o indiferentes – no como el resultado de mil causas indeterminadas y casi siempre indeterminables sino como un episodio de la historia del fin de este mundo y del comienzo del otro [...] Ahora lo veo como un acontecimiento no menos quimérico que el de la Segunda Vuelta de Cristo. (*Sombras*, 105)

Not only was this chimerical as religion could be chimerical, but it was inauthentic, 'una parodia de la verdadera religión':

⁴⁵ For discussion of the coincidences between Eliot and the politics of the left see Michael North, 'Eliot, Lukács, and the Politics of Modernism', in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. by Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 169-89.

⁴⁶ *Christian Newsletter*, 14 August 1940; quoted in Roger Kojecký, *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 126.

La ideología que habíamos abrazado con entusiasmo nos ofrecía un mediocre sucedáneo de la antigua transcendencia. En su vocabulario no era difícil percibir el eco de las creencias antiguas: comunión, salto final, redención, comienzo de otro tiempo, regreso del tiempo del origen, hombre universal y otros parecidos. (*Sombras*, 106)

The certainty with which Paz separates their belief in revolution from Marxism proper owes much to hindsight; yet the pseudo-religious character of Paz's own interests were clear as early as 'Ética del artista'. Eliot himself identified the religious character of leftist thinking, although it seems likely that he was not entirely one of 'those who agree with Joseph de Maistre':

Communism is at least a respectable political theory, with its own standards of orthodoxy, in the eyes of those who agree with Joseph de Maistre that *toutes les institutions imaginables reposent sur une idée religieuse, ou ne font que passer*.⁴⁷

In another 'Commentary' he distinguished carefully, as he had done with Matthew Arnold, between religion and 'the pleasurable emotions of a religious type' which communism offered.⁴⁸ Paz was attracted by an Arnoldian or communist religion without a religion and so he was uncomfortable with the kind of distinction that Eliot was making. Looking back at *Taller* in 1983, he was undecided about whether religion itself was an illusion, or whether, as Eliot believed, substitutes for it were the illusion.

The disappearance of Paz's political allegiances as *Taller* ceased left a vacuum that he was keen to fill:

Desde 1942 comencé a examinar con ojos distintos a los de la época de *Taller* la herencia de la poesía moderna, especialmente la experiencia surrealista y, en el otro extremo, la de Pound y Eliot. (*Sombras*, 109)

His reading of Eliot and Pound and of the surrealists belongs to the years that he spent in the United States and then Paris. The rather earlier date of 1942 that he proposes here indicates that these new directions grew out of the break-up of *Taller*.⁴⁹ Both influences

⁴⁷ 'Commentary', *Criterion*, 13, 51 (January 1934), p. 273.

⁴⁸ 'Commentary', *Criterion*, 11, 44 (April 1932), p. 467. See 'Arnold and Pater' (1930): "The power of Christianity has been in the immense emotion which it has excited", he [Matthew Arnold] says; not realizing at all that this is a counsel to get all the emotional kick out of Christianity one can, without the bother of believing it' (*SE*, 434).

⁴⁹ Jason Wilson suggests that 'it is only when Paz writes with hindsight that the aims of his magazine [*Taller*] and group seem strangely close to surrealism', *Octavio Paz: A Study of his Poetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 16

were hindered at an earlier date by *Taller*'s leftism. The 'respuestas que habían dado los surrealistas y los poetas de lengua inglesa a la pregunta sobre la poesía y la historia' were 'descartadas' according to Paz, although this contradicts his comments on the Eliot anthology. He also confesses of the surrealists' split with Stalin's Russia that 'ese mérito inmenso era para nosotros un demérito' (*Sombras*, 107). When these influences did become available, however, Paz devoured them and, in his essay 'Poesía e historia' (1983) on *Laurel*, an anthology of 1941 that Paz helped to edit, Eliot, Pound and the surrealists provide the examples by which Spanish poetry of the years 1915 to 1940 is judged.

Yet the immediate aftermath of *Taller*'s disappearance found Paz at an impasse which is reflected in his 1942 collection of poems, *A la orilla del mundo y Primer día, Bajo tu clara sombra, Raíz del hombre, Noche de resurrecciones*. A contemporary review by Antonio Sánchez Barbudo identified the materialism that Paz had found in Neruda's *Residencia en la tierra* - 'lo que queremos es alma, pero "alma de bulto y de substancia", como decía Unamuno'.⁵⁰ However, just as Cuesta had noted a search for a 'metafísica' in Paz's *Raíz del hombre*, Sánchez Barbudo concludes that this 'alma' desires something more than material 'substancia':

Sólo en Dios sería satisfecha, pero eso no lo sabremos sino después de muertos
[...] Esto es lo humano, esto es la poesía, y por eso se escribe: para clamar, para
anhelar. Sólo clamor o anhelo es posible para el hombre: no hay certeza. (p. 45)

The 'human' philosophies of the left had been found wanting, but what could fill the vacuum? Paz saw an Eliotic world of ruins:

Dormimos sobre escombros,
solos entre las ruinas y los sueños. (*AOM*, 118)

Not only does the material world lack meaning but, lacking meaning, it begins to lose reality:

No tiene cuerpo el mundo
y la tierra es estéril. (*AOM*, 106)

Jorge Cuesta had contrasted the order and meaning that a 'metafísica' would give to Paz's work with 'ocio psicológico'. The lack of meaning that now surrounded him led

⁵⁰ 'A la orilla del mundo', *El Hijo Pródigo*, 1, 1 (15 abril 1943), p. 44.

Paz, according to Manuel Ulacia, into ‘una depresión muy aguda’ (*Árbol*, 91). He was left with his solitary consciousness, vainly calling for relief in ‘El polvo’: ‘Quítame la conciencia’ (*AOM*, 132). Eliot is clearly an influence on these poems which becomes more pronounced when Paz moves to the United States in 1944. However, Francisco de Quevedo who, I have argued, provided a model for the solitary consciousness at the end of ‘Crepúsculos de la ciudad’ - ‘la razón, cayendo en la inefable / y helada intimidad de su vacío’ (‘Crepúsculos’, 3) - is also a presence. Quevedo features conspicuously, along with Eliot according to more than one critic, in the last major essay that Paz wrote before he left Mexico, ‘Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión’.

The essay was originally delivered as a speech at a congress to celebrate four hundred years from the birth of San Juan de la Cruz. It is generally considered one of his most important prose works, both in terms of ideas and style, and Paz himself described it as an ‘el embrión de la mayoría de mis reflexiones sobre la experiencia poética’.⁵¹ It starts from ‘la naturaleza inapresable de la realidad’ (*PL*, 291), a problem that had first been raised in *Vigilias*. Paz identifies two contrasting human responses to this ‘naturaleza’, the one disinterested and the other ‘una actitud de dominación’ (*PL*, 292), both of which were present in primitive societies: ‘La primera, de adoración, se manifiesta en la religión. La segunda, de poder, en la magia’ (*PL*, 293). This contrast established, Paz asks on which side of it does the poet belong? Either, he replies, and concludes with a new contrast:

El poeta lírico establece un diálogo con el mundo; en este diálogo hay dos situaciones extremas, dentro de las cuales se mueve el alma del poeta: una, de soledad; otra, de comunión. El poeta parte de la soledad, movido por el deseo, hacia la comunión. (*PL*, 293)

The ease with which he is prepared to drop one set of oppositions – *adoración-poder*, *magia-religión* – in favour of another – *soledad-comunión* – is disconcerting, and typifies his method of argument. Paz does not proceed with a clear *telos* in view, but by a succession of dialectical oppositions. He produces a statement, opposes it and then improvises on what that opposition might entail. It is a method which, since it has no specific end in view, frequently runs up dead ends, or out of momentum. When this occurs, he simply changes direction and opens a new paragraph with a question – ‘¿Qué clase de testimonio es el testimonio poético...?’ (*PL*, 295) - or a forthright statement -

⁵¹ ‘Reflejos: réplicas: Diálogos con Francisco de Quevedo’ (1996), in *OC14*, 74.

‘La poesía es la revelación de la inocencia que alienta en cada hombre y en cada mujer...’ (PL, 296) - which generate new opposing terms that propel the argument to further opportunities for improvisation. The result is simultaneously agile and sententious.

When Paz does eventually get to San Juan he is not detained long:

Los [poemas] de San Juan de la Cruz relatan la experiencia mística más profunda de nuestra cultura. Estos poemas no admiten crítica, interpretación o consideración alguna. (PL, 299)

His argument quickly moves on to an example that is the opposite of mystical union:

Quevedo expresa la certidumbre de que el poeta ya no es uno con sus creaciones: está mortalmente dividido. Entre la poesía y el poeta, entre Dios y el hombre, se opone algo muy sutil y muy poderoso: la conciencia, y lo que es más significativo: la conciencia de la conciencia, el narcisismo intelectual. (PL, 299-300)

Not only is Quevedo placed in dialectical opposition to San Juan, but he is himself an example of dividedness – ‘está mortalmente dividido’. The ‘conciencia’ that defines Quevedo places him in association with Valéry and Eliot, and Paz employs the ‘entre’ of *The Hollow Men* to describe his condition. Paz establishes a connection between Quevedo and Eliot that I have already observed in *Entre la piedra y la flor* and ‘Crepúsculos de la ciudad’.

Paz was ambivalent about the scepticism of the Contemporáneos, an earlier version of the dividing ‘conciencia’ that so fascinates him in Quevedo, and he concludes the essay with an attempt to attenuate Quevedo’s example. He gives a list of poets - Novalis, Nerval, Baudelaire, Lautréamont, and Poe - and proclaims:

La seducción que sobre nosotros ejercen estos maestros, nuestros únicos maestros posibles, se debe a la veracidad con que encarnaron ese propósito que intenta unir dos tendencias paralelas del espíritu humano: la conciencia y la inocencia, la experiencia y la expresión, el acto y la palabra que lo revela. (PL, 303)

Poetry should bring unity where there is division, but this is a ‘propósito’ rather than the ‘certidumbre’ that Quevedo expresses; Paz is himself divided between an art that represents an experience of conflict and one that mitigates it.

The ‘entre’ of *The Hollow Men*, which Paz employs repeatedly in his poems of the 1930s to express a consciousness of disjunction, is present in ‘Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión’. Critics have also suggested that Paz’s use of the literary past – San

Juan and Quevedo – to define his own project reveals the influence of Eliot's essays. One can't be certain when Paz first read Eliot's prose. A translation of *Selected Essays* appeared in Mexico in 1944, by which time Paz was actually in the United States and probably reading Eliot's essays in English. It is not improbable, however, that he had read some of Eliot's prose by the time he was writing 'Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión'.⁵² Manuel Ulacia is confident that 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' lies behind Paz's work:

Por primera vez en su carrera, el poeta sitúa su obra dentro de una tradición de la cual él se siente parte. Sin duda alguna, antes de escribir este texto fundacional de su poética, que es el antecedente de *El arco y la lira*, el joven Paz había leído el ensayo de T. S. Eliot "La tradición y el talento individual". (*Árbol*, 102)

In spite of its assertiveness, 'sin duda alguna' implies that the connection is based on supposition rather than fact. Certainly, Paz's reading of San Juan and Quevedo does reveal an awareness of 'not only the pastness of the past, but of its presence' (*SW*, 40). Yet Eliot is not the first writer to express the relativism that underpins such assertions as 'the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past' (*SW*, 41); and if Paz shares this perspective it does not necessarily imply a causal relation between the two works. Leyla Perrone-Moisès argues convincingly that the tendency of writers such as Eliot, Pound, Borges and Paz to read the past as a function of their present interests is a general tendency among modern writers rather than the discovery of any one of them:

On pourrait multiplier les exemples d'attitudes semblables envers le passé littéraire dans les textes théoriques des écrivains modernes, qui préfèrent parler d'un "espace littéraire" que d'une temporalité littéraire. Malgré la particularité de leurs contributions, les écrivains-critiques cités ci-dessous coïncident tous dans le refus d'une histoire littéraire diachronique et linéaire.⁵³

Ulacia's reading is not strengthened by the manner in which he applies 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' to Paz. He simplifies the distinction that Eliot attempts to draw between emotions and feelings (*SW*, 45):

⁵² Anthony Stanton, who discussed Eliot with Paz on numerous occasions, could not tell me when Paz first read Eliot's prose. When negotiations between Marie José Paz and the Fundación Octavio Paz finally make Paz's library available for research, a more certain assessment may be possible.

⁵³ 'Choix et valeur dans l'oeuvre critique des écrivains', *Littérature*, 94 (1994), p. 104.

En algunos autores encuentra, por ejemplo, bien expresadas las emociones; en otros, los sentimientos. En su obra poética, fiel a lo que propone en teoría, Eliot va a buscar siempre el equilibrio entre ambos. (*Árbol*,104)

He then reads this simplification as the model for Paz's own use of opposites:

Paz va relacionando estas categorías [soledad-comunión], que él mismo ha planteado y que son diferentes de las planteadas por Eliot (emoción y sentimientos), con la tradición literaria en la que inserta su obra [...] Crea, a partir de ejemplos dicotómicos muy específicos, todo un sistema de analogías que sitúan su poesía dentro de un eje de movimiento. (*Árbol*, 106)

As I have argued, Paz's fondness for dialectical pairings is a basic component of his style, and while there is clearly a similar fondness for paired contrasts in Eliot – emotions-feelings, classicism-romanticism and so on - it is difficult to credit this coincidence to direct influence with any certainty.

Ulacia then quotes the famous passage in Eliot's essay which draws an analogy between the mind of the poet and a catalyst (*SW*, 44-5):

Estos planteamientos del poeta se reflejarán en la obra crítica y creativa de Paz. El poeta mexicano asumirá las tradiciones con las que dialoga de esa forma, es decir, críticamente. Pero la asunción de las tradiciones con las que dialoga operan de la misma manera que los gases a los que alude Eliot en su ensayo. Parece como si éstas desaparecieran ante la presencia de la mente del poeta, por la capacidad que tiene éste de lograr la catálisis. Este fenómeno ocurrirá, como se verá, en toda la obra de Paz. En ella parece que lo único que queda es la voz inconfundible del poeta. (*Árbol*,105)

Ulacia takes an analogy from Eliot's work and, rather than claiming either that the idea it contains, or the verbal form that it employs, has influenced Paz (as one can argue, for example, that Valéry's own fondness for scientific analogies is an influence on Eliot's reference to catalysis), he uses the analogy as an heuristic for his own description of Paz. Eliot has not influenced Paz here but Ulacia's description of Paz.

Anthony Stanton is more circumspect about Eliot's influence than Ulacia and chooses a more convincing essay:

Tal como ocurre en "Los poetas metafísicos" (1921), el ensayo de T. S. Eliot que seguramente le sirvió de modelo, se postula un poeta total, anterior a la caída o fractura, cristiano en ambos casos (Dante o Donne para Eliot; San Juan para Paz). Eliot llamó a esta escisión "la disociación de la sensibilidad" y la vio como un acontecimiento traumático que dividió a la sensibilidad unificada en dos partes discordantes (intelecto y emoción; razón y sentimiento). (*Inventores*, 183-4)

Stanton provides a clear summary of the similarities between the schemes laid out in the two essays. The contrast between the ‘reconciliación’ of San Juan and the ‘conciencia’ of Quevedo relates more closely to Eliot’s distinction between a poetry in which there is a ‘unification of sensibility’ and a ‘reflective’ poetry’ (SE, 288 & 287), than the pairing of emotion and feeling does to the various dichotomies of ‘Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión’.

There is also an attempt in Paz to situate his central contrast between San Juan and Quevedo historically. Just as for Eliot, ‘In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered’ (SE, 288), so for Paz:

En esa sociedad, donde, quizá por última vez en la historia, la llama de la religiosidad personal pudo alimentarse de la religión de la sociedad, San Juan realiza la más intensa y plena de las experiencias: la de la comunión. Un poco más tarde esa comunión será imposible. (PL, 298)

And just as Frank Kermode questions the historical value of the ‘dissociation of sensibility’ - ‘the great and in some ways noxious historical myth of Symbolism’ –⁵⁴ so Stanton expresses reservations about ‘Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión’:

La polarización dualista de esta poética revela la proyección, sobre la historia de la poesía, del principio religioso de la caída: se trata de un esquema teológico de la historia de la poesía, de dudosa objetividad. (*Inventores*, 183)⁵⁵

Yet to demonstrate similarities between Paz’s essay and Eliot’s is not to prove an influence. The distinction that ‘The Metaphysical Poets’ draws between thought and feeling, and the analogous distinction that Paz makes between a mystic ‘reconciliación’ and a consciousness that brings separation, had itself been anticipated by the medieval Catholic Church several centuries earlier, as Louis Martz explains:

⁵⁴ *Romantic Image* (London: Collins, 1971), p. 182.

⁵⁵ Eliot’s own varying comments on San Juan indicate how subjective his own scheme is. In ‘The Clark Lectures’ (1926) San Juan, along with Teresa de Ávila, is post-Fall: ‘The Aristotelian-Victorine-Dantesque mysticism is ontological; the Spanish mysticism is psychological. The first is what I call classical, the second romantic’, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1996), p. 104. Yet he used San Juan for the epigraph to ‘Sweeney Agonistes’, and in 1938 declared that, ‘the only poetry I can think of which belongs to quite the same class as Herbert – as expression of purity and intensity of religious feeling, and [...] for literary excellence – is St. John of the Cross’, ‘George Herbert’, *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 27 May 1938; quoted in Schuchard, 184. Donne himself was relegated in Eliot’s scheme and was replaced by Lancelot Andrewes as the example of a pre-Fall sensibility. Paz probably encountered this version of the scheme in the *Cruz y Raya* translation of ‘Lancelot Andrewes’ before he came across ‘The Metaphysical Poets’.

During the later Middle Ages, it appears, a fissure developed between the theologians and the devotees of affective piety [...] The scholastics threw a deep shadow over the affective life, a shadow which led some, such as Thomas à Kempis and his Brothers of the Common Life, to renounce scholastic subtleties as the brood of folly and the bitter fruit of that *curiositas* which St. Bernard had denounced as the father of sin.⁵⁶

The use that both Paz and Eliot make of the Fall myth also has numerous antecedents in romantic and modern literature, as M. H. Abrams has demonstrated in *Natural Supernaturalism*.⁵⁷

Nor was Eliot the only, or the most conspicuous, example available to Paz of a modern poet reading poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for his own ends. The Spanish ‘generación del 27’, partly inspired by the Mexican poet and man of letters Alfonso Reyes, had revived the work of Luis de Góngora; and on a more modest scale, *Contemporáneos* had published works by and about Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Góngora was read as a precursor of *poesía pura*, but as René de Costa explains, the more politicized 1930s found a different example:

While the avant-garde of the 1920s was pleased with itself for being able to appreciate the formal perfection of Góngora, the more committed writers of the thirties would find in the radical audacity of a Quevedo a more complete literary model.⁵⁸

Pablo Neruda was instrumental in this revival-cum-appropriation of Quevedo; he published a series of Quevedo’s sonnets on death with some of the late correspondence in *Cruz y Raya* in 1935.⁵⁹ Neruda’s Quevedo was not only the scourge of corrupt politicians but also, according to Robert Pring-Mill, a salve for deep fears:

In “Viaje al corazón de Quevedo”, a lecture given in 1943, Neruda makes it clear that Quevedo’s neo-stoicism seemed to offer a way out of his personal horror at the inexorable quality of time and death, which dominates many poems of *Residencia en la tierra*.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ *The Poetry of Meditation*, 2nd edn (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 112.

⁵⁷ See, in particular, Chapter Three, ‘The Circuitous Journey: Pilgrims and Prodigals’, 141-95.

⁵⁸ *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press, 1979), pp. 91-2.

⁵⁹ Francisco de Quevedo, ‘Cartas y sonetos de la muerte’, sel. by Pablo Neruda, *Cruz y Raya*, 33 (diciembre 1935), 83-101.

⁶⁰ *Pablo Neruda: A Basic Anthology*, xxiv.

As I have argued, Neruda demonstrated a resolute hostility towards philosophical problems, and his Quevedo is broadly materialist: 'la metafísica es inmensamente física, lo más material de su enseñanza'.⁶¹ Yet the lesson that he took from Quevedo, that death is not the end of life but an integral part of it, recalls the more philosophically-minded writers that Paz associated with Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* - Rilke, Heidegger, and Villaurrutia:

¿Si al nacer empezamos a morir, si cada día nos acerca a un límite determinado, si la vida misma es una etapa patética de la muerte [...] no somos parte perpetua de la muerte, no somos lo más audaz, lo que ya salió de la muerte? [...] Quevedo me dio a mí una enseñanza clara y biológica [...] Si ya hemos muerto, si venimos de la profunda crisis, perderemos el temor a la muerte. ('Viaje', 14)

Paz, who confessed of Quevedo in 1996 that 'no cesa de asombrarme su continua presencia a mi lado, desde que tenía veinte años hasta que ahora que tengo ochenta [...] Ha sido, para mí, un poeta indispensable' (*OC14*, 71-2), must have been attracted to a politically committed alternative to the 'artepurista' Góngora. He also made the connection with Rilke and Heidegger - 'leí a Quevedo desde una perspectiva ajena a su tiempo' (*OC14*, 73) - which, I have suggested above, was implicit in Neruda's reading. Anthony Stanton notes that with Paz's Quevedo, 'estamos muy cerca de la idea heideggeriana de la angustia' (*Inventores*, 186). Paz's Quevedo was partly Nerudan then, political and anguished, as Paz had praised the Chilean poet's work in 'Pablo Neruda en el corazón'. Yet he was also a supreme example of 'conciencia', staring into 'las aguas del abismo / donde me enamoraba de mí mismo', a companion of Rilke, Valéry, Villaurrutia, Gorostiza, Heidegger and Eliot, a poet not only of anguished emotion, but of absence. Paz had attempted in his prose to side with the certainties and vigour of Neruda against the consciousness and doubtfulness of the Contemporáneos, a doubtfulness which had always had a place in his poems. Now in Quevedo he was able to dignify a sceptical stance. This is where 'Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión' bears most significantly on Paz's relationship with Eliot, not in its possible use of the literary history of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' or 'The Metaphysical Poets' but in its continuation of a more populous debate in Paz's own work of which Eliot had been a part since the early 1930s.

⁶¹ 'Viaje al corazón de Quevedo', in *Obras completas*, vol. 2, 14.

One aspect of that debate, which became particularly troublesome in the case of Eliot, was the role in poetry of religious belief. Anthony Stanton declares that 'Paz registra una honda crisis espiritual en 1942' (*Inventores*, 192); yet he is uncomfortable with the 'lenguaje religioso' of 'Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión':

En Paz, la crisis espiritual, moral y existencial no desemboca en un conflicto de tipo religioso, aunque sí tiende a expresarse en un lenguaje religioso, cosa paradójica en un poeta que se confiesa no creyente. ¿Es posible que la influencia de Quevedo haya sido tan avasalladora en aquel momento que el joven poeta se haya visto obligado a expresar su crisis existencial en un lenguaje religioso? (*Inventores*, 193)

I don't see why Paz's use of a religious rhetoric in this essay should be attributed to the overweening influence of Quevedo. Quevedo's dividedness and narcissistic self-consciousness attract Paz as an example of 'una escisión psíquica frente a lo sagrado'.⁶² He thus provides a means of exploring the myth of the Fall, which is common to many secular romantic and modern writers. I have already noted strong religious undertones in Paz's writings of the 1930s, to which Stanton is sensitive, and in this essay both Rimbaud -

Mediante la palabra, mediante la expresión de su experiencia, procura tornar sagrado el mundo; con la palabra sacramental la experiencia de los hombres y las relaciones entre el hombre y el mundo, entre el hombre y la mujer, entre el hombre y su propia conciencia. (*PL*, 295)

- and a particularly Blakean-sounding anti-idealism -

Los poetas han sido los primeros que han revelado que la eternidad y lo absoluto no están más allá de nuestros sentidos sino en ellos mismos. (*PL*, 297)⁶³

- continue this secular-religious project.

Religious language is hardly out of place in a speech delivered at a conference dedicated to a saint. A round table discussion between members of the conference, which was published in *El Hijo Pródigo*, provides an example of the rhetoric and ideas that provided the context for Paz's own contribution. The debate between an idealizing

⁶² Paz, 'El poeta talentoso transforma la tradición', *Excelsior*, 16 febrero 1991, p. 3.

⁶³ A translation of William Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by Xavier Villaurrutia appeared in *Contemporáneos*, 2, 6 (noviembre 1928), 213-43. In *Corriente alterna* (México: Siglo XXI, 1967), p. 58, Paz describes reading it at the same time as a translation of what would become Chapter Five of André Breton's *L'Amour fou*, 'El castillo estrellado', which appeared in an issue of *Sur* dedicated to surrealism (abril 1936).

philosophy and worldly one surfaces in an exchange between Paz and José Gaos. Gaos argues that a relationship with Christ is not truly mystical since he is an earthly manifestation of the divinity:

La unión *mística* sería por esencia la unión exclusivamente con *Dios*, algo mucho menos personal que *Cristo*; con *Cristo*, con una persona, no cabría propiamente mística.⁶⁴

Paz disagrees - the mystical relation is not with '*entidades abstractas*':

Para el místico, cristiano o no, el objeto, *su objeto*, es siempre algo *concreto*, *personal*. La relación entre el místico y Dios es una relación erótica, esto es, privada, personal, y no una relación con *entidades abstractas*. ('Debate', 139)

And in the case of San Juan, a poet as well as a mystic, not only is the relation with a concrete entity, but it is expressed in the concrete form of the word:

El místico puede muy bien prescindir de la expresión de su experiencia. La distinción entre uno y otro está, pues, en la palabra. Creo que en el caso de San Juan - y de allí la confusión - hay a la vez un místico, un poeta y un teólogo. ('Debate', 143)

Paz performs the symbolist move by which the dualism of body and soul is transposed to the realm of language. He calls on Paul Valéry to articulate this new dualism of a language that is '*sagrado*' without falling into abstraction:

Yo diría que unas ciertas expresiones tienden a producir un lenguaje que no se me ocurre llamar de mejor modo que *sagrado*. Ese es el caso de la poesía y naturalmente de la poesía mística - en prosa o verso. Todo lenguaje es racional, pero, recordando a Valéry, la prosa sería como la marcha, como la ida; la poesía como la danza, como la ascensión. Poeta y místico tratan de divinizar o eternizar las cosas, sin abstraerlas, sin hacerlas abstractas, sin abstracciones. ('Debate', 144)

The problem that he would then encounter is that not only is every language '*racional*', but it is also social, and as he argued in his speech, the ascension of San Juan to an experience of communion was enabled by '*la naturaleza de la sociedad en que [...] vivió*' (PL, 298). Paz's own society was much closer to the world of Quevedo. As the quotation from Valéry indicates, Paz is now willing to view the social, or '*historical*', in terms of language as well as the politics of the left, a move which brings him closer to

⁶⁴ José Bergamín and others, 'Poesía, mística y filosofía: debate en torno a San Juan de la Cruz', *El Hijo Pródigo*, 1, 3 (15 junio 1943), p. 139.

the Eliot that the Contemporáneos were reading at the turn of the 1920s and 30s. It prepares him for his work of the United States, which combines the historical awareness of his first response to Eliot with a new enthusiasm for formal and colloquial experiment.

For Anthony Stanton the most significant difference between *Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión* and 'The Metaphysical Poets' is that 'Paz queda fascinado por la figura de Quevedo mientras que Eliot demuestra escaso interés en los poetas de la escisión' (*Inventores*, 184). This is neither entirely fair to Eliot, who refers to Jules Laforgue and Tristan Corbière in his essay, and who places the modern poet categorically in a post-Fall world 'from which we have never recovered' (*SE*, 288); nor does it recognize Paz's own ambivalence about the contrast between the 'reconciliación' of San Juan and a Quevedo who is 'mortalmente dividido'. As I have noted, Paz concludes with praise for modern poets who have managed to 'unify' the divisions that Quevedo embodies. Paz's essay expresses several different attitudes to dividedness: in Quevedo division is embraced; whilst in the poets of the conclusion it is resolved. Ulacia settles with this latter view and reads the essay as 'uno de los orígenes de la teoría de la conciliación de los contrarios del pensamiento paciano' (*Árbol*, 102). I don't think that the example of Quevedo can be tamed so easily, however. Anthony Stanton hedges his bets and, finding a third attitude towards division - 'Entre estos dos polos de inocencia y conciencia, de soledad y comunión, se mueve toda poesía.' (*PL*, 301) – concludes that poetry for Paz embraces both the earlier standpoints: 'Se da así un movimiento dialéctico entre dos polos' (*Inventores*, 182). Both critics can support their position with individual quotations from the text, but neither can account for the promiscuity of Paz's own different pronouncements. Paz expresses three quite distinct versions of poetry's relationship to conflict – poetry can embrace conflict; it can mitigate it; or it can oscillate between the two. He never resolves these attitudes into a new whole, or settles for any one of them with any great commitment.

This is where Paz's relationship to Eliot bears significantly on 'Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión', whether Eliot had a direct influence on it or not (and I have attempted to establish that if he did, he was one among many). Paz's work of the 1930s performs a constant debate between belonging, or communion, and excision, or solitude: the sensual disposition towards the world of St.-John Perse and Carlos Pellicer versus the desolation of Xavier Villaurrutia and Eliot; the political beliefs shared with his peers and Pablo Neruda versus the isolated scepticism of the Contemporáneos; San

Juan de la Cruz versus Quevedo. While these conflicts are productive, there is an understandable desire, which is particularly conspicuous in the prose, to tip the scales, to evade the burden that a consciousness of division imposes and to find some reconciling belief, usually politico-religious. The disintegration of his allegiances to the left as the 1930s drew to a close denied him this comfort. At the end of 1943 he left Mexico City for the United States where his relationship with T. S. Eliot's work – in itself both an example of a world divided by the shadow of consciousness, and also of a potentially consoling, if unattractive, religious faith – would enter a new stage.

Chapter Seven

U. S.

Paz travelled to San Francisco at the end of 1943 with a Guggenheim grant and plans to write an essay on 'América y su expresión poética'. He soon gained a post in the Mexican diplomatic service, however, and so work on what would eventually become *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950) was put aside. He spent nearly two years in the United States, working first as *empleado auxiliar* in the Mexican Consulate in San Francisco, then gaining a promotion to New York in August 1945, with time then spent in Vermont and Washington before he was sent to Paris at the end of the year.¹ Paz's relationship with his friends on the left had reached a crisis before he left Mexico. His trip to the United States removed him from those debates. The political allegiances of *Taller* had hindered his assimilation of Eliot. Now Paz re-read him in a new context: 'Leí con fervor a los poetas norteamericanos, especialmente a T. S. Eliot' ('Pasos', 55). Those North American poets included Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens and e. e. Cummings; and they were accompanied by William Blake and W. B. Yeats. However, it is Eliot that Paz singles out: 'A Eliot lo había leído en México pero volví a leerlo y lo comprendí mejor' ('Genealogía', 18). The most recognizably Eliotic works of his *Obra poética* were produced in this period. Yet Eliot did not simply fill the gap left by Mexican political debate. In an interview with Anthony Stanton, Paz explained that the crisis of his last years in Mexico continued beyond his departure:

Había vivido aislado y había sufrido dificultades no solamente de orden material y político, como mucha gente piensa, sino de orden espiritual. Todo esto me afectó profundamente. Tardé algunos años en rehacerme. La poesía fue mi confidente [...] y mi maestra. ('Genealogía', 18)

Eliot is a conspicuous presence in this poetry that was both 'confidente' and 'maestra'; but as 'confidente' implies, he helped Paz to express his 'dificultades' as much as he provided a solution to them.

¹ I have taken these details from Anthony Stanton's introduction to *Correspondencia: Alfonso Reyes/Octavio Paz (1939-1959)* (México: Fundación Octavio Paz/FCE, 1998), pp. 18-19 and *It*, 22-3.

The first poems that Paz wrote in the United States were gathered in the section of *Libertad bajo palabra* (1949) titled *Asueto*. Enrico Mario Santí describes a shift in the poems of this period from ‘un subjetivismo apasionado al paulatino descubrimiento del mundo circundante’.² Eliot’s presence hovers around this shift, although it is difficult to account precisely for his role. In ‘Lago’ (1944), for example, Eliot participates in an attack on a certain romantic aggrandizement of the imagination as represented by Baudelaire. Paz’s poem carries an epigraph from the French poet’s ‘Rêve parisien’: ‘*Tout pour l’oeil, rien pour les oreilles.*’ Baudelaire describes a dream landscape, that is, a landscape he has created, in which he perceives ‘un silence d’éternité’ only to be confronted with the sordid external world when he wakes up.³ Paz forgoes this assertion of the imagined over the real with a different engagement between poet and physical landscape:

Entre montañas áridas
las aguas prisioneras
reposan, centellean,
como un cielo caído.⁴

The details of the scene resist the designs of the poetic imagination. They are both recalcitrant – ‘áridas’ – and imposing – the waters are ‘prisioneras’, and in turn bring ‘un cielo caído’ down to earth as they reflect it. Yet, as the poem develops Paz is able to reverse this image so that the water, rather than controlling the expanse of sky, takes on the connotation of the infinite with which the object of its reflection is associated:

agua y cielo reposan,
pecho a pecho, infinitos. (*LBP*, 62)

He has won a vision through his material surroundings of something beyond them. But that vision depends on the material, which has a life independent of the poet:

estremece las aguas,
delgado, un soplo frío. (*LBP*, 62)

² ‘Introducción’, *Libertad bajo palabra* (1935-1957) (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1990), p. 58.

³ *Oeuvres complètes*, 106.

⁴ *Libertad bajo palabra* (México: Tezontle, 1949), p. 61.

The breeze blows a mist over, and the water no longer reflects an open sky but takes on the opacity of the element that has intervened:

Sólo para los ojos
esta luz y estas aguas,
esta perla dormida
que apenas resplandece.

¡Todo para los ojos!
Y en los ojos un ritmo,
un color fugitivo,
la sombra de una forma,
un repentino viento
y un naufragio infinito. (*LBP*, 62)

So precarious are such visions that they can be erased by ‘un repentino viento’, taking the observer with them from a heavenly infinity to ‘un naufragio infinito’. Paz’s poem provides a neat lesson that human understanding of the infinite is bound to experience in time, and that knowledge of the immaterial depends upon the material. The lesson’s conclusion is effected with an extended reference to Phlebas the Phoenician of *The Waste Land*. The ‘perla dormida’ recalls ‘Those are pearls that were his eyes’ (*CPP*, 62), itself taken from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, and the ‘naufragio infinito’ Phlebas’s ‘death by water’ (*CPP*, 71). In the version of the poem that appears in Enrico Mario Santí’s 1990 edition of *Libertad bajo palabra*, ‘la sombra de una forma’ is modified to ‘la sombra de una fortuna’ (p. 99), a reminder that Phlebas first occurs in the tarot reading that Madame Sosotris conducts in ‘The Burial of the Dead’. Paz’s application of ‘perla’ to the lake also maintains the Eliotic association of pearls with eyes by making the lake not simply a ‘perla’ but a ‘perla dormida’. The fate of the poet’s vision, ‘Sólo para los ojos’, is bound to what the lake sees, or rather, reflects, so that when the water turns opaque the poet receives a vision of his own extinction – ‘un naufragio infinito’.

I have said that Paz ‘refers’ to *The Waste Land* but, while I believe that the nexus of associations between pearls, eyes and drowning derives from Eliot’s poem, I am not convinced that Paz is pointing the reader there in the manner of an allusion. The images can function independently of their source, much as those images can function independently of *The Tempest* in Eliot. If Paz is not consciously referring to Eliot then the link between those images and their source is complicated and the passage cannot be used straightforwardly as evidence of the way that Paz reads Eliot’s work as a whole. Nevertheless, the role that ‘un naufragio infinito’ plays in the poem as the negation of a

poetic imagination that would sweep all before it, is consistent with the Eliot that Paz uses in his earliest poems. There, a composite Eliot and Villaurrutia counters the poetic selves of Pellicer and Perse, who find their place in the world by exerting a form of imaginative agency upon it. In 'Lago', the images from *The Waste Land* stand in a similar relation to the Baudelaire of 'Rêve parisien'. Eliot opposes the poet's vision of eternity with a materialist, or realist, sense of the world's recalcitrance to that vision. Yet the materialism of 'Lago' is only partial. Paz does not oppose a fictive vision of eternity with a realistic acknowledgement of his surroundings, a strategy that would be forced to acknowledge that the physical world resists any form of meaning. Paz instead uses the change in the scene brought about by the wind to replace a positive vision of eternity with a negative, although it is no less a poetic construction for being negative, vision of drowning. There is more implied in the debate of 'Lago', into which Paz introduces Eliot, than is actually realized; yet it is a debate that Paz will expand through his reading of Eliot during his time in the United States.

In 'Primavera a la vista', another of the *Asueto* poems, Paz again uses Eliot as a check on the poetic imagination, but this time the influence is formal rather than imagistic:

Desnudo cielo azul de invierno, puro
como la frente, como el pensamiento
de una muchacha que despierta, frío
como sueño de estatua sin memoria. (*LBP*, 67)

The positioning of the adjectives 'puro' and 'frío' offers an equivalent to the present participles of the opening to 'The Burial of the Dead'. In each case, Paz's use of the line division isolates the adjective, the unadorned observation, from the simile – 'como la frente...', 'como sueño ...' – which is the figurative and interpretive elaboration of that observation. After the extended simile of 'como el pensamiento / de una muchacha que despierta', 'frío' intercedes as a contrary movement back to the real world which is the starting point for these poetic excursions, and the simile that he now produces – 'como sueño de estatua sin memoria' – while still a vision imposed on the world is now one that is drained of life. Paz's adjectives function differently from the present participles of 'The Burial of the Dead' which halt the movement of the opening lines, but also project energies disconcertingly beyond them. Nor is there Eliot's startling, and grimly suggestive blend, of the concrete and the abstract, image and observation - from lilacs to memory and desire. Paz's use of the line break and his substitution of adjectives for

present participles differ from the passage that is his source. Yet his use of Eliot here is consistent with his use of Eliot elsewhere as a check on the flight of the poetic imagination.

Santí notes that an increased concern with the objective world in the poems of this period is accompanied by a change in diction:

Ese cambio de percepción resulta crucial y coincide con un cambio de lenguaje poético [...] Al desprenderse de sí, el sujeto abandona también su retórica apasionada para aprehender (en su doble sentido de captar y entender) el mundo en momentos privilegiados. (Santí, 58-9)

He is right to view a search for the objective world, the abnegation of self, and the adoption of a less obtrusive rhetoric as three aspects of a single project. However, his identification in these poems of what he describes, citing Paz, as ‘el “lenguaje de la conversación, el lenguaje coloquial”’ (Santí, 59) needs qualification.⁵ Certainly, in these poems the phrasing is conversational and the idiom is spare. However, in the essay from which Santí quotes, Paz associates the renewed interest that these poems display in the objective world with an adoption of popular medieval forms rather than a contemporary colloquial idiom:

Me propuse respetar la realidad sensible; sin caer en la poesía descriptiva, afirmé la existencia del mundo exterior [...] Pasé también de los metros largos - once y catorce sílabas - a los versos más cortos de las formas populares. Aprendí mucho de la poesía medieval y de las canciones y formas tradicionales de los siglos XVI y XVII. (‘Pasos’, 55)

Federico García Lorca and Rafael Alberti in Spain, then José Gorostiza in Mexico, had used these forms, but in an interview of 1988, it was Antonio Machado that Paz suggested as a model for the poems of *Condición de nube*, which had been gathered in *Asueto* in the first edition of *Libertad bajo palabra*:

En *Condición de nube* (1944) las principales influencias fueron las de la poesía tradicional española y, probablemente, la lectura de Antonio Machado. (‘Genealogía’, 19)

Libertad bajo palabra also presents the reader with a harsher, more contemporary form of colloquial language, however, ‘Las palabras’:

⁵ He cites from ‘Pasos’, 55.

Dáles la vuelta,
cógelas del rabo (chillen, putas),
azótalas... (*LBP*, 16)

The carefully staged progression of 'Lago' or 'Primavera a la vista' has been lost for a more immediate use of imperative, and expletive. In 'Antonio Machado' (1951), Paz elaborates on this desertion of the idiom that he had found in the popular medieval forms of the *Romancero*:

No son ésas nuestras palabras. El idioma de la urbe moderna, según lo vieron Apollinaire y Eliot, es otro. Machado reacciona frente a la retórica de Rubén Darío volviendo a la tradición; pero otras aventuras - y no el regreso al Romancero - aguardaban a la poesía de lengua española. (*Peras*, 170)

With something of the enthusiasm of the convert, the rhetoric of *Asueto* is rejected in favour of 'Las palabras'. Paz later explained that 'Hacia 1944 [...] descubrí el lenguaje de la conversación, el lenguaje coloquial. No la poesía popular y tradicional - como en los poemas del período anterior - sino el lenguaje de la ciudad' ('Pasos', 55). Paz does admire Machado's attempt to free poetry from the rhetoric of Darío, but this is only a partial achievement. Now the adventure of modern art consists 'sobre todo en descubrir la poesía de la ciudad, en transmutar el lenguaje de la urbe y no en regresar al idioma de la poesía tradicional' (*Peras*, 171), an adventure that follows Apollinaire and Eliot.

The distinction that Paz makes in this essay between the colloquial language of Machado and Eliot has the clarity of hindsight. As he conceded in interview, Pedro Henríquez Ureña's *La versificación irregular en la poesía castellana* suggested a continuity between the *Romancero* and the more recent experiments of Eliot and Apollinaire:

Me interesaron las ideas de Henríquez Ureña sobre la versificación irregular. El sostiene que es la forma más antigua del verso español. Esto me hizo pensar que, a pesar de su origen francés, el moderno verso libre en realidad era una vuelta al origen de la poesía en nuestra lengua. ('Genealogía', 15)⁶

In 'Antonio Machado', Paz polemicizes what was in fact a more gradual dialogue. Paz admired Machado for his attack on Narcissism – 'un vicio feo, / y ya viejo vicio'

⁶ Paz would probably have read the second edition (1933) of Henríquez Ureña's work which expanded on the thesis that had been published in 1920.

(*Poesías*, 289) – and uses his attack on the idea of a unitary self as the epigraph for *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950):

Abel Martín, con fe poética, no menos humana que la fe racional, creía *en lo otro*, en “La esencial heterogeneidad del ser”, como si dijéramos en la incurable *otredad* que padece *lo uno*.⁷

Machado’s creation of the apocryphal philosophers Abel Martín and Juan de Mairena provided a rhetorical embodiment of the theme of “La esencial heterogeneidad del ser”. Yet for Paz, Machado’s poems didn’t engage in the experiment with different voices and registers that was the next stage of this ‘modern’ experiment:

Es el único entre sus contemporáneos y sucesores inmediatos que tiene conciencia de la situación del poeta en el mundo moderno. Al mismo tiempo, cierra los ojos ante la aventura del arte moderno. (*Péras*, 171)

Paz reads Machado as the author of a project that Eliot, Apollinaire, and Paz himself, would continue. Machado is measured against Eliot, but Eliot is also made to continue Machado. It is in this context that the colloquial experiments of Eliot provide a new idiom - harsher than the old, more violently contemptuous of the poetic self; but also more truly dramatic, subject to qualification by other idioms, a part of a hostile modern world, ‘testimonial e histórico’ (*PL*, 113). Paz uses Eliot as a formal model to express the theme of history with which Paz always associates him. In the poems of *Asueto*, Paz attempted to connect with the objective world through a particular poetic idiom. As a response to the failure of this project, he found an idiom that could itself stand as objective to the extent that it was used by non-poets. Eliot hovers around poems such as ‘Lago’ and ‘Primavera a la vista’ as a representative of this anti-poetic world, but it is in the adoption of Eliot’s colloquialism and use of contrasting voices that Paz is able to develop this presence.

In a later account of the contrast between the colloquial idioms of Machado and Eliot, Paz provides a discussion which, although retrospective, also expands on some implications of the contrast which must have been active in the 1940s:

Es muy distinto adoptar formas poéticas tradicionales a usar en un poema los giros del lenguaje hablado. Lo primero, por más novedosa que sea la adaptación, subraya una continuidad; lo segundo, implica una ruptura. La yuxtaposición y el

⁷ *El laberinto de la soledad* (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1998), p. 141.

choque del lenguaje poético culto con el *idioma de la conversación*, como lo llamaba Eliot, es una de las notas distintivas de la poesía moderna; el empleo de las formas tradicionales revela más bien una nostalgia: nadie habla así en nuestras grandes ciudades. Sin embargo, la supervivencia de estas formas es una prueba de vitalidad de la antigua cultura; nos habita un hombre subterráneo que, en ciertos momentos, se *acuerda* y habla en octosílabos. (*Sombras*, 73)

Eliot's language is artistically progressive; it is 'una ruptura' where Machado's stresses continuity. It is worth recalling that in spite of his politically conservative reputation, Eliot was still viewed as an experimental writer in Mexico, a role that Paz himself was always keen to adopt. The artistic adventure of Eliot's idiom is in fact implicitly viewed as politically progressive in contrast to Machado's language, which is 'una nostalgia', a term that Paz uses against Eliot elsewhere ('TSE', 41). The distinctive characteristic of Eliot's language, however, is that it is spoken 'en nuestras grandes ciudades' rather than in an exclusively poetic realm. Its harshness is also a virtue – Paz describes 'giros' and 'choque'. Eliot provides the rhetorical means of exploring the debate between real and imaginary that poems such as 'Lago' and 'Primavera a la vista' suggest in a more tentative form.

North American poets had provided models for the earlier experiments in Mexico with colloquial verse of Salvador Novo and Salomón de la Selva, which I discussed in 'Precursors'. Both poets were included in the *Laurel* anthology of 1941, which Paz helped to edit, and Paz credited de la Selva with introducing poetry in Spanish to 'los giros coloquiales y el prosaísmo' (*Sombras*, 68). Paz connects his own use of 'el lenguaje de la conversación, el lenguaje coloquial' ('Pasos', 55) to his reading of North American and English poets during his time in the United States. Quite apart from the clear colloquial element in the work of Eliot, Pound and William Carlos Williams, he favoured the later Yeats, 'despojado ya de los atavíos simbolistas, simple y directo' ('Genealogía', 18). This poetic reading was given theoretical support by Eliot's essay 'The Music of Poetry', which was published in translation in *El Hijo Pródigo* only a year after it had been delivered as a lecture at Glasgow University.⁸ Paz was a member of the editorial board for *El Hijo Pródigo*, and Enrico Mario Santí speculates that the essay may well have appeared at his instigation (Santí, 32), although its translator, Octavio G. Barreda, who was a founder and editor of the magazine, had already

⁸ 'La música de la poesía', *El Hijo Pródigo*, 1, 1 (15 abril 1943), 21-30.

provided the translation of 'A Song for Simeon' that was included in the *Taller* collection of Eliot's poems.

'La música de la poesía' clearly had an impact on Paz. His reference to 'el lenguaje de la conversación' echoes references to 'el lenguaje hablado' in Barreda's translation ('Música', 24), and in *El arco y la lira* he describes the importance of 'la música de la conversación, según ha mostrado Eliot en un ensayo muy conocido'.⁹ In fact, the essay probably enjoyed earlier and greater fame in Mexico, through the publication of Barreda's translation in *El Hijo Pródigo*, than it did in the English speaking world where it would have to wait until *On Poetry and Poets* (1957) before it enjoyed widespread circulation. Paz refers more often to this essay than he does to any of Eliot's *Selected Essays*, which he could either have been reading in English at this stage, or in Sara Rubinstein's translation, which appeared in 1944.¹⁰

The title of Eliot's essay is misleading; its main concern is not music as such but the conflict between colloquial speech and the musical tendencies of verse – 'la ley de que la poesía no debe apartarse demasiado del lenguaje ordinario a que estamos acostumbrados a usar y oír diariamente' ('Música', 23). Eliot describes the oscillation between the two tendencies:

En determinados períodos, la tarea ha consistido en explorar las posibilidades musicales del convencionalismo, establecido entre la relación del idioma del verso y el del lenguaje hablado; en otros la tarea ha sido captar los cambios en el lenguaje coloquial, que son fundamentalmente cambios en pensamiento y sensibilidad. (p. 27)

Quite apart from the content of his argument, Eliot's reference to the poet's 'tarea' presents his credentials as a vanguardist poet with a conscious project. This would appeal to Paz who was himself looking to position himself in the vanguard of poetic experiment, as his comments on Machado demonstrate. Eliot's argument attacks the Pateresque idea that poetry, as one of the arts, 'aspires towards the condition of music' through 'suppression or vagueness' of matter.¹¹ Rather than aspiration, a hazy desire for an ideal realm, Eliot attends to the pragmatic 'posibilidades', and the rather mundane attempt to 'captar' colloquial speech. 'Hasta su deterioración a la larga – deben

⁹ *Arco* 1, 275. In Vill Paz refers to 'el famoso ensayo de Eliot sobre "la música en la poesía"' (p. 64); he also describes 'los ritmos del habla diaria o, como decía Eliot, de "la música de la conversación"' in *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1998), p. 398.

¹⁰ *Los poetas metafísicos y otros ensayos sobre teatro y religión* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1944).

¹¹ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London: Collins, 1961), pp. 129 & 131.

aceptarse por el poeta' ('Música', 29), he insists. Eliot places an emphasis on the quiddity of the poet's material, which is not then transcended but deepened when its musical possibilities are explored:

Está obligado [el poeta], como el escultor, a ser leal al material con que trabaja;
con los sonidos que él escucha debe hacer su melodía y su armonía. (p. 25)

In a Spanish American context this attack on Pater could be read as a rejection of the more sumptuous musical effects of the *modernistas*, although the emphasis that Eliot places on the materiality of the word - 'el sonido de un poema es, como el significado, una mera abstracción del poema' ('Música', 26) – also insists on the consciousness of language that characterizes the French symbolists, the *modernistas* and *Poesía pura*. However, Eliot's reference to 'los cambios en el lenguaje coloquial, que son fundamentalmente cambios en pensamiento y sensibilidad' (p. 27) brings an awareness of historical change into contact with his awareness of language. He is thus able to provide a meeting point for Paz's leftist insistence on poetry as the register of a historical reality and the consciousness that he inherited from the Contemporáneos of language as a material with its own integrity. In the poems of *Asueto*, Paz set the poetic imagination against the real, intractable world. Eliot suggests a transposition of this conflict into the purely linguistic realm – a poetic, musical language is set against an intractable colloquial idiom that is real to the extent that it is in general use, not merely confined to poems. The form that results is dialogic. Eliot allows that 'la disonancia, y hasta la cacofonía, tienen su lugar', and describes 'un arreglo como de contrapunto' in the verse of Virgil (pp. 25 & 22). His essay confirms Mangua's observation of a contrast in *The Waste Land* between 'las expresiones más vulgares del diálogo callejero' and 'las metáforas refinadas de un cerebro en bonanza' (Mangua, 9), and when Paz adopts colloquial language it is within this dialogue between the poetic and the anti-poetic.

'El joven soldado' employs the dialogic form that the 'The Music of Poetry' had suggested and provides a clear example of the transition in Paz's work from the rhetoric of *Asueto* to a contemporary colloquial idiom. It was written in Berkeley at the same time as many of the other *Asueto* poems, but it appeared in the penultimate section of *Libertad bajo palabra, Puerta condenada*, where Eliot's influence is most apparent. The

poems of *Asueto* attempt to register the natural world which sits beyond the confines of the self and an obtrusive poetic rhetoric. The question of relationship is still alive in 'El joven soldado'. The relationship between the poet's self, his language, and the natural world, has been widened, however, to include human relationship.

The title of the poem, 'El joven soldado', provides a double image of youth, and, through war, the threat of death. There is also, for the Paz of voluntary exile from Mexico, the question of what a death for one's country might mean, a question of personal identity related to a communal whole. Paz observes this soldier from the outside, a focus of much of *The Waste Land*, confronted with people and situations with whom the poet's participation, and hence relationship, is confused. Paz's poem turns upon the uncertainty of the relationship between poet and soldier. In the first section, 'Árbol quieto entre nubes', he explores the appropriateness of a certain poetic rhetoric:

Aquel joven soldado
era sonriente y tímido y erguido
como un joven durazno. (*LBP*, 96)

The first two lines are unexceptional physical description with, in 'tímido', the kind of assumption that one habitually makes about a stranger on the basis of cursory observation. The simile 'como un joven durazno' is then a surprise. Of the characteristics listed in line two, while 'erguido' could apply to a 'durazno', 'tímido' and 'sonriente' are of a different order; they can only be applied to a tree (or the fruit of that tree) if one sees it metaphorically as a person. The reader therefore has retrospectively to see this 'durazno' as similar to a human in order to facilitate the simile that forces him or her to see this human as similar to a 'durazno'. The hierarchy of the two points of the figure *soldado-durazno* is upset. The effect is unsettling, a feeling compounded by the suspicion that 'durazno' is an aggressively benign image to apply to a soldier - perhaps as a means of appeasement.

'Árbol quieto entre nubes' attempts to arrive at some connection with the soldier, but finds itself directed by the logic of its own metaphors. Language comes between the self and the object of its contemplation. In the third section of 'El joven soldado', 'Conversación en un bar', Paz introduces a new rhetoric:

- Sábado por la tarde, sin permiso.
La soledad se puebla y todo quema.
(El viento del Oeste son dos vientos:

en la noche es un búfalo fantasma,
al alba es un ejército de pájaros). (*LBP*, 99)

The first line is clearly overheard speech, with its casually appended 'sin permiso'. The second line then seems to be the poet's voice, describing the irruption of the outside conversation on the poet's solitude in terms of metaphor - 'todo quema'. The section in brackets is laden with metaphor. It is not a description of the outside scene nor is it exactly a contribution to the conversation. It bears an associative relationship to it: the wind provides an image of something sweeping in from afar just as this conversation has intruded on the poet's solitude; the division into a night and a morning wind wanders from the suggestion of 'la tarde'. The parenthetical voice does not control interpretation but is itself directed by the speaking voice. The alternation between spoken idiom and a more elaborate figurative discourse is maintained:

-Nos encerraron en la cárcel.
Yo le menté la madre al cabo.
Al rato las mangueras de agua fría.
Nos quitamos la ropa, tiritando.
Muy tarde ya, nos dieron sábanas.
(-En otoño los árboles del río
dejan caer sus hojas amarillas
en la espalda del agua.
Y el sol, en la corriente,
es una lenta mano que acaricia
una garganta trémula). (*LBP*, 99-100)

Again, the images in brackets are suggested by the dialogue: the clothes that the soldiers had to strip off become the autumn leaves, the showers the river; but where the showers were cold and had the soldier swearing, the image of the sun on the water is a warm and gentle 'acaricia', which ushers in an erotic, and feminine, counter - 'una garganta trémula' - to the crudely masculine tenor of the conversation.

Manuel Ulacia (*Árbol*, 109) cites 'A Game of Chess' as a model for the contrast between colloquial speech and a 'poetic' voice:

"My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak.
What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
I never know what you are thinking. Think."

I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones. (*CPP*, 65)

For Ulacia, the contact between the two registers poeticizes the colloquial: ‘Las conversaciones cotidianas se convierten en el material poético por excelencia, sobre todo cuando son confrontadas con el discurso lírico y metafísico’ (*Árbol*, 109). Yet the Eliot passage presents a situation in which communication has failed between the colloquial and the poetic voice. Although the implied relationship between speakers is different in ‘Conversación en un bar’, the two voices clearly operate in separate worlds, a disjunction that is accentuated by the brackets, which contain the poet’s observations. Those observations are clearly inspired by the conversation, but they do not communicate with it. They attempt to palliate the content of the soldiers’ speech by translating it into a figurative discourse just as the ‘durazno’ of ‘Árbol quieto entre nubes’ actively placates the violent potential of the soldier. Yet since it is a one-way dialogue in which the soldiers are not aware of the poet, their conversation is not altered. Rather than poeticizing the colloquial passages, ‘Conversación en un bar’ throws the value of a particular figurative register in doubt. Paz uses a dialogic form to dramatize a poetic voice and consciousness in relation to other voices.

The problem arises with a dialogic form that since its contents are divided between speakers, the reader cannot appeal to any single authoritative voice within the poem for its meaning. José Quiroga senses this problem and compensates by suggesting a whole range of meanings for the poem in quick succession:

The narrative thread concerns the conscripts’ desire for women – a desire that lands these voices into jail. By means of the metaphorical tissue of his commentary, the poet implies that the men’s desire is analogous to that of nature. As in much of Paz’s poetry, nature here is seen as a body. But in ‘Conscriptos’ the primary dialectics between nature and man opposes a corporealized nature to the disembodied voices of the conscripts. This natural ‘flow’ given in the parenthetical, poetical statements, also breaks down already fragmented voices. On the one hand, the poet’s voice tries to give the poem its sense of flow but finds itself interrupted by the conscripts’ utterance. Like the disembodied Yucatecan peasants in ‘Between the Stone and the Flower’ the conscripts have been rendered prisoners of nature.¹²

His first three sentences present the reader with a complicated mix of assertion and implication: desire is analogous to nature which is seen as a body, a sequence which implies that nature is desiring and that desire is a body. These various premises are then

¹² *Understanding Octavio Paz* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), p. 29.

abandoned abruptly, and he tries to contrast the 'disembodied voices' of the conscripts with corporeal nature. He does not explain why their voices should be more disembodied than the poet's voice in brackets or any other voice for that matter once it has been written down. Finally, in a dubious comparison with the peasants of *Entre la piedra y la flor*, who are not in fact given their own voice, although they are addressed directly, he concludes that these disembodied voices are somehow prisoners of nature. Quiroga has clearly picked up a loose sense of the natural and of the disembodied versus the corporeal from the 'metaphorical tissue' of the poet's commentary which he has then applied quite arbitrarily to the passage as a whole. He is determined to extract from the passage a conclusive comment about the soldiers rather reading it dramatically as a poet's idiom and consciousness responding to a non-poetic verbal reality.

'Conversación en un bar' concludes ambiguously, in fact:

-Después de un mes la vi. Primero al cine,
luego a bailar. Bebimos tres cervezas.
En una esquina nos besamos...
(-El sol, las rocas rojas del desierto
y un cascabel erótico: serpientes.
Esos amores fríos en un lecho de lavas...)
-El fuego del infierno es fuego frío. (LBP, 100)

The erotic awareness of the commentary here becomes disgusted as the couple kissing become 'serpientes'. Quite apart from the echo of 'What the Thunder Said' in 'las rocas rojas del desierto', the poem seems closer to the tone of *The Waste Land*. The strong erotic vein that is apparent in Paz's earliest poems has been curtailed, a turn which provides a significant context for the revaluation of the erotic that surrealism will later provide. The final line presents a problem, however. It seems to continue the tone of the last bracket, and one is tempted to read its sense as a continuation; yet it is punctuated as if it were a return to the soldier's speech. This reading would cast it as a colloquial-proverbial expression. Both voices seem possible. It is a largely synthetic resolution of a conflict to which, in this poem at least, Paz cannot find a resolution, which is perhaps why he dropped the line from later versions.

'Conversación en un bar' does not come to a conclusion so much as generates meaning out of a conjunction between two voices which fail to reach a point of resolution. In an essay of 1954, 'Poesía mexicana moderna', Paz discusses the editing of a poem by Alfonso Reyes which itself contrasts lyrical with prosaic passages:

A un poema de Reyes, *Yerbas del Tarahumara*, Castro Leal le arranca una estrofa como quien corta un ala. Esa estrofa - adrede prosaica - cumplía una función dentro del poema: le daba peso, materialidad y subrayaba así el lirismo de otros pasajes. No es otro el sentido de ciertas irrupciones del habla coloquial o erudita en los poemas de Eliot, Pound y Apollinaire.¹³

Here, in an echo of Eliot's comment that 'ningún poeta es capaz de escribir un poema de cierta amplitud si no es un maestro de lo prosaico' ('Música', 25), the contrast is largely positive – the colloquial gives 'materialidad' that is, a kind of reality, to the poetic passages. Yet the material world can provide an obstacle to the poetic imagination as well as an object for its attention. The colloquial voices of 'Conversación en un bar' provide an analogous verbal materialism which the poetic register cannot fully assimilate. The relationship between self and object of the earlier poems has been replaced by a dialogue between speaking voices which nevertheless remain isolated from each other.

After 'Conversación en un bar', which confronts the poet's voice with the soldiers' only to be left more aware of the divide between them, the final section of the poem, 'Razones para morir', feels its way toward possible assertion, beginning with the 'patria' that might provide common cause for the poet and the soldier:

Unos me hablaban de la patria.
Mas yo pensaba en una tierra pobre,
pueblo de polvo y luz,
y una calle y un muro
y un hombre silencioso junto al muro.
Y aquellas piedras bajo el sol del páramo
y la luz que en el río se desnuda. (LBP, 100)

The light on the river recalls 'Conversación en un bar', as the speaker loses himself distractedly in an erotic reverie towards the land that he will not consider as a *patria*, that is, within military rhetoric. There is an aimlessness to the observation: neither the eager contact with the bare 'realidad sensible' of the land that the poems of *Asueto* had sought, nor is there a belief in the transcendent significance that the land would have for the patriot. Paz concludes that none of this can belong to him, erotically or otherwise, nor can he belong to it:

¹³ This passage was excluded from the version of the essay that appeared in *Peras* (p. 53), but was included in *OC4*, 63.

No hay patria, hay tierra, imágenes de tierra,
polvo y luz en el tiempo. (*LBP*, 101)

In *El ogro filantrópico*, Paz would ask: ‘Como en el poema de Eliot, ¿México es “la tierra muerta, la tierra de cactus”, cubierta de ídolos rotos y de imágenes apolilladas de santos y santas? ¿No hacemos sino “dar vueltas y vueltas al nopal”?’¹⁴ ‘Razones para morir’ inhabits that barren landscape - an even more barren landscape, in fact, since there are not even broken idols. That ‘No hay...’ also has its antecedents in the pattern of aspiration and negation that structures *The Hollow Men*.

From this negation, however, Paz moves towards freedom:

La libertad me sonreía
como un abismo contemplado
desde el abismo de nosotros mismos.
La libertad es alas,
es el viento entre hojas, detenido
por una simple flor... (*LBP*, 102)

The uplift of ‘La libertad es alas’ takes hold of the line that follows, but then the movement is checked by ‘detenido’. That pause isolates ‘por una simple flor’ and allows a sense of wonder to flow into the quiet steadiness of the line. This, in its breathlessly eager contemplation, is one of the most attractive lines of the poem. In ‘Árbol quieto entre nubes’ the wind stripped the peach-tree of its leaves and brought death to the poem. This line answers that metaphor. It is a precarious response, achieved in momentary feeling rather than any more lasting perception. It can harden in images that sound more like manifesto statements - ‘es morder la naranja prohibida, / abrir la vieja puerta condenada / y desatar al prisionero...’ (*LBP*, 102) - but it can also express a sense of wonder:

esa piedra ya es pan,
esos papeles blancos son gaviotas,
son pájaros las hojas
y pájaros tus dedos: todo vuela (*LBP*, 102)

This is not just praise of the imagination, but the imagination in action as it turns the sheets of paper into birds. The term ‘hojas’ means sheets of paper, but it also means ‘leaves’, reversing an earlier image of falling leaves in ‘Árbol quieto entre nubes’ to a

¹⁴ *El ogro filantrópico* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1990), p. 97.

more upbeat perception. The 'todo vuela' then stands back from this act of imaginative transformation, the poet surprised at his own power. It is the antithesis of the bracketed passages in 'Conversación en un bar', a precarious re-assertion of the power of imaginative vision captured in image. In fact, the upsurge of feeling in this assertion seems to be as much generated by the images as generative of them.

The final part of 'Razones para morir' then returns to the soldier:

Mas otros no me hablaban.
En su silencio yo escuchaba mi silencio.
"Nada explica mi muerte,
porque el silencio es un espejo negro
donde se ahogan todas las preguntas".
Y en su silencio sólo había
un bostezo infinito - y luego, nada. (*LBP*, 102-3)

In later versions, Paz presents the reader with an experiment in which a beleaguered poet's voice is subjected to colloquial idiom followed by a blend of manifesto and wondered lyric perception. Here he returns to the theme of communion, with a bleak conclusion. Paz only finds his own silence in the soldier's silence, which he gives voice to ironically as a meditation on silence. This irony locks the conclusion in a circle. Paz had tried to imagine the soldier coming to terms with death; when the soldier does come to terms with it, accepting it as a final nothing, nothing is made of Paz's trying to find something out from him about it. This enacts the assertion that everyone dies alone, that death, the meaninglessness of death separates us all. One can only find communion through some shared meaning, a meaning 'Razones para morir' seems to find momentarily, but which ultimately it can't hold on to. It describes a search for connection and meaning which fails.

In the 1968 edition of *Libertad bajo palabra*, Paz excised the first two sections of 'El joven soldado', leaving 'Conversación en un bar' and 'Razones para morir', minus the final passage which returns to the soldier, under the collective title 'Conscriptos U.S.A.'. ¹⁵ This is the version that appeared in all subsequent editions. By editing 'El joven soldado' down to the two poems of later editions Paz seems to concede that the poem doesn't really work as whole, choosing not to rewrite it but leaving the reader with samples of the more successful passages. 'Conversación en un bar' appears as a more purely formal experiment, isolated from the context that gave it meaning, and

¹⁵ *Libertad bajo palabra: obra poética (1935-1957)*, 2nd edn (México: FCE, 1968), pp. 68-70.

in itself, as a dialogic poem, a challenge to the reader's desire for univocal interpretation.

Mike González and David Treece identify two main tendencies in Latin American poetry of the 1940s and 50s. The one, to which they consign Paz, is formalist and leads 'towards the recreation of a poetic elite and a practice of separation'; the other leads towards

the reintegration of poetry and the poet into the public realm [...] In the end, the implication is always the recovery of a collective voice, the resumption of community. If for Paz that is a historical impossibility, and a utopia realized only in imaginative *retreat* from the world, the finest poets of contemporary Latin America have *entered* the world to discover community and a solidarity found not outside it, but veiled and hidden, yet always present in the world of loving human beings in their material relations.¹⁶

Paz's attitude towards the possibility of a 'collective voice' is presented as closed. Yet 'Conversación en un bar' demonstrates a Paz who experiments with form in order to explore the possible relations between separate voices. His failure in this poem to find a 'collective voice' is not final, and displays a concern for the particularity of the world and its inhabitants which the vocabulary of 'community' and 'solidarity' that González and Treece favour merely gestures towards.

Throughout his career, Paz's use of Eliot tends to have both a formal and a political, or social, aspect. His adoption of colloquial language is no exception. As Manuel Ulacia points out, expressions such as 'Yo le menté la madre al cabo' in the soldiers' speech are specifically Mexican colloquialisms: 'Paz busca en la expresión coloquial una ontología nacional' (*Árbol*, 112), he concludes. The final section of 'El joven soldado' also raises questions about the meaning of 'patria', and Ulacia supports his argument suggestively, if briefly, with reference to *El laberinto de la soledad*. Although it wasn't composed until the summer of 1949 in Paris, Paz's analysis of Mexican psychology and belief refers back to his experience in the United States. Ulacia draws a link between the book's first chapter, 'El Pachuco y otros extremos' and the use of colloquial language in 'El joven soldado' (*Árbol*, 113). Paz later said of the Mexican immigrants he discusses in this chapter that 'me reconocí en los *pachucos* y en su local

¹⁶ *The Gathering of Voices* (London/New York: Verso, 1992), p. 195.

rebeldía contra su presente y su pasado' (*It*, 24). Yet Paz ultimately stands outside their world, observing their dress and then speculating on their inner life. *El laberinto de la soledad* shares with 'El joven soldado' a sense of separation from other Mexicans rather than a shared identity.

Ulacia also draws a link to the chapter 'Los hijos de La Malinche' which deals with "un grupo de palabras prohibidas, secretas..." (*Árbol*, 109-10). Anthony Stanton describes this chapter's illustration of Mexican psychology and beliefs with swearwords and sexual punning alongside quotes from poetry and philosophy as one of the book's 'most daring innovations'.¹⁷ Ulacia finds a use of 'habla mexicana, que encarna la búsqueda de una ontología, es decir, que figura como expresión de un ser nacional' (*Árbol*, 109). While Ulacia's argument is convincing, his vocabulary of 'ontología' and 'un ser nacional' does share a tendency with González and Treece to make the general point at the expense of the particular observation. 'La música de la poesía' described changes in colloquial speech as 'fundamentalmente cambios en pensamiento y sensibilidad' ('Música', 27). Eliot chooses the relation between individual sensibility and language as the basic structure on which any generality such as 'ser nacional' must be built. Similarly, in a passage from 'Poesía en tiempos de Guerra' which appeared in *Letras de México* in 1943, Eliot argued that a poet's first duty as poet was to his language rather than to his 'patria':

El poeta, como hombre, debe consagrarse a su patria no menos que los otros hombres, pero distingo entre su deber como hombre y su deber como poeta. Su primer deber como poeta es para con su idioma natal; es preservar y desarrollar ese idioma.¹⁸

Paz was trying to find that language in the United States. As Ulacia points out, another significant influence in that search was William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain* (*Árbol*, 115). The conclusion that Paz drew from Williams was that

la realidad de América es material, mental, visual y, sobre todo, verbal [...] Más que una realidad que descubrimos o hacemos, América es una realidad que decimos. (*SyG*, 113-14)

¹⁷ 'Models of Discourse and Hermeneutics in Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad*', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 20, 2 (April 2001), p. 225.

¹⁸ 'Testimonios (sobre la política y la juventud)', *Letras de México*, 19 (15 septiembre 1943), p. 105. The passage appeared alongside similar statements from Antonio Machado and Juan Ramón Jiménez.

American reality was constructed by the language that Americans speak rather than by the meta-language of 'nation' that Ulacia adopts. Paz does not enter Williams's own polemic against Eliot for 'carrying my world off with him, the fool, to the enemy'.¹⁹ In fact, Paz seems to have little trouble accommodating these seemingly antagonistic influences to his own ends, although his criticism of Machado's "españolismo" (*Peras*, 171) and language derived from 'las viejas ciudades de Castilla', compared to the language of 'la urbe moderna' (*Peras*, 170) that he finds in Eliot, does itself replicate, with Eliot transformed from villain to saviour, Williams's defence of an art 'rooted in the locality which should give it fruit' (*Autobiography*, 174).

Paz's use of a contemporary colloquial idiom in *El laberinto de la soledad*, and in poems such as 'El joven soldado' and 'Las palabras' clearly involves the issue of Mexican, or a broader American, identity. More importantly, however, he was looking, prompted by Eliot and William Carlos Williams, to find a basic level of verbal and psychological reality upon which the abstractions of political belief or national identity could safely be built. He was disillusioned with the abstractions of the left that had once been his home, and in *Itinerario* he describes the pleasure of reading George Orwell in this period:

Economía de lenguaje, claridad, audacia moral y sobriedad intelectual: una prosa viril. Orwell se había liberado completamente, si alguna vez los padeció, de los manierismos y bizantinismos de mis amigos, los marxistas y exmarxistas franceses. Guiado por su lenguaje preciso y por su nítido pensamiento, al fin pude pisar tierra firme. (*It*, 75-6)

When González and Treece attempt to dismiss Paz in favour of abstractions such as 'community' and 'solidarity', and when Ulacia praises his 'ontología' and search for 'un ser nacional', they miss the aspect of his colloquial experiment that was looking for some verbal 'tierra firme'. As 'El joven soldado' demonstrates, this project was borne from a feeling of isolation – the section of *Itinerario* that covers this period is titled 'El sendero de los solitarios' – and remained tentative.

Paz's mistrust of the meta-language that the political left employed was also a mistrust of his own verbal powers as a poet. In 'Conversación en un bar' colloquial speech qualifies the poetic register. He described this effect in interview:

¹⁹ *Autobiography* (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 174.

Sin clara conciencia, comencé a practicar una suerte de simultaneísmo: ponía dos realidades frente a frente y provocaba un choque [...] Todo esto tendría un desarrollo más pleno en algunos poemas posteriores. ('Genealogía', 18)

He describes a 'choque' which is generated by the simultaneous presentation of two distinct realities. The form is a means of placing different worlds in contact, and Paz qualifies the experiment as 'sin clara conciencia'. He uses the term *simultaneísmo* repeatedly in later years to describe *The Waste Land* and his own poems that are inspired by Eliot.²⁰ The use of a term, however, tends to imply a clearly delineated project and intention. One must be careful not to read retrospective interpretation as guiding intention.

In his essay 'Poesía e historia (*Laurel y nosotros*)' (1983), Paz engages in extended discussion of *simultaneísmo*, a form which has been promoted to the status of 'una visión tanto como un método de composición':

La pluralidad de tiempos y espacios que se conjugan en la ciudad moderna encontró su expresión más viva en el *simultaneísmo*. Describirlo y definirlo me tomaría muchas páginas: baste con decir que es la traducción o trasposición verbal o rítmica de esa propiedad de la ciudad moderna consistente en ser la conjunción de distintos tiempos y espacios en un aquí y ahora determinados. En su origen fue un procedimiento que los poetas tomaron del montaje cinematográfico. Cendrars y Apollinaire fueron los iniciadores: para ellos el *simultaneísmo* fue la forma lírica por excelencia de la poesía de la ciudad. Eliot y Pound transformaron este procedimiento y lo insertaron en una visión de la historia. Fue un cambio esencial. En lengua española – salvo en un breve poema de Tablada: *Nocturno alterno* – el *simultaneísmo* no aparece sino hasta mi generación. (*Sombras*, 91)

Paz explains the form in terms of the environment in which *simultaneísta* poems have been produced. The form mimics the city it inhabits, and conjoins 'tiempos y espacios'. Yet in 'Conversación en un bar' the turn from erotic reverie to disgust in the bracketed poet's meditations implied a disjunction of voices as much as a conjunction. The voices are placed in apposition but their worlds do not meet, much as F. H. Bradley had described experience in Eliot's notes to *The Waste Land*: 'mi experiencia yace dentro de mi propio círculo, un círculo cerrado por fuera' (Flores, 48). This isolation troubled the Paz of 'Conversación en un bar', and *El laberinto de la soledad* would be written, in

²⁰ The term derives from the French *simultanisme*, or *simultanéisme*. Its paternity was contested by Guillaume Apollinaire and Henri-Martin Barzun. For Apollinaire's side of the debate see 'Simultanisme-Librettisme', *Les Soirées de Paris*, 15 June 1914; repr. in *Oeuvres en prose complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), pp. 974-79. Apollinaire was clearly the more able poetic exponent of the form, as well as the more rigorous theorist, and Paz credits him, along with Blaise Cendrars, as the 'iniciadores' (*Sombras*, 91).

part at least, as an attempt to exorcize it. Yet by describing the form as mimetic, Paz glosses over his initial use of *simultaneísmo* which presented the failure of a particular poetic voice as it attempted to come to terms with the urban world that surrounded it. Paz's retrospective comments display a tendency of his prose to mitigate the experience of conflict in his poems.

Paz credits the Mexican poet José Juan Tablada's poem, 'Nocturno alterno', first published in *Li-Po* (1920), as the first *simultaneísta* poem in Spanish. Tablada alternates lines that describe New York and Bogotá – 'Neoyorquina noche dorada / **Fríos muros de cal moruna**' concluding with an element they share:

Y sin embargo
es una
misma
en New York
y en Bogotá

la Luna ...!²¹

When Tablada died in 1945, the University of Columbia asked Paz to read a homage to the Mexican poet. Paz quoted 'Nocturno alterno' entire and described it as 'un ingenioso poema que es una pequeña obra maestra' (*Peras*, 63), yet he did not use the term *simultaneísmo*. Paz's dialectical cast of mind was attracted by this form that could effectively splice two separate poems together. At this stage, however, as he experimented with the form, he was unwilling, or perhaps unable, to elaborate on its significance or possible applications.

Simultaneísmo emerged piecemeal from Paz's experiences, reading of other poets, and philosophical and political thinking, rather than from a clear project to write a new urban poetry. The discussion in 'Poesía e historia' of other poets, rather than the direct attempts to isolate and account for *simultaneísmo* itself, provide the most revealing comments on the form. The first and second fragments of Juan Ramón Jiménez's poem *Espacio* appeared in this period.²² Paz reads it as an alternative to the composition of *The Waste Land*:

En los grandes poemas simultaneístas - pienso en *The Waste Land*, en los *Cantos* y, aunque menos complejo, en *Le musicien de Saint-Marry* [sic] - hay un centro, un imán que mantiene unidos a todos los fragmentos. En *Espacio* el imán es la

²¹ *Obras I – Poesía* (México: UNAM, 1971), p. 407.

²² *Cuadernos americanos* 11, 5 (1943) & 17, 5 (1944).

sensibilidad de Juan Ramón: finísima, vasta, e insuficiente [...] La realidad no es una impresión: es un tiempo, un espacio y unos hombres - un mundo. Detrás de los *Cantos* de Pound, a pesar de su frecuente incoherencia, oímos el rumor confuso y aterrador de la historia humana; detrás de *Espacio* hay un hueco y un silencio: el yo del poeta, después de devorar al mundo, se ha devorado a sí mismo. (*Sombras*, 66-7)

Jiménez's attempt to hold his poem together with his own perceiving self failed to satisfy Paz, much as his own shorter poems of *Asueto* gave way to the poems of *Puerta condenada*. Paz used Eliot to develop his own work and its relationship to Hispanic precursors. The dominant precursors in Mexico were still the Contemporáneos:

En ninguno de los "Contemporáneos" aparecen "los otros", esos hombres y mujeres de "toda condición" con los que, día tras día, hablamos y nos cruzamos en calles, oficinas, templos, autobuses. En Pellicer hay montañas, ríos, árboles, ruinas; también hay héroes y villanos estereotipados pero no hay gente. Dos maneras opuestas y en el fondo coincidente de anular a "los otros" [...] En los poemas de Gorostiza, Villaurrutia y Ortiz de Montellano no hay nadie; todos y todo se han vuelto reflejos, espectros [...] Para que se comprenda lo que quiero decir, citaré a dos poetas muy opuestos, Eliot y Apollinaire. La gente es la ciudad y la ciudad es la doble faz de los hombres, la faz nocturna y la diurna. Los hombres reales e irreales a un tiempo [...] La ciudad es la gente y la gente es nuestro horizonte. La poesía de la generación de *Contemporáneos*, admirable por más de una razón, carece de ese horizonte. Poesía con alas pero sin el peso – la pesadumbre – de la historia. (*Vill*, 23-4)

Paz's use of Eliot never strays far from negotiations with the influence of the Contemporáneos: Pellicer's world of 'montañas, ríos, árboles, ruinas' is recognizable in the poems of *Asueto*. Eliot's influence on the urban, colloquial poems of *Puerta condenada* both opened expressive possibilities and afforded Paz some distance from his Mexican forebears. The association that Paz makes between 'ciudad', 'gente', and 'historia' develops the argument of 'Ética del artista' against the Contemporáneos to specify that a 'historical' poetry is a poetry of the city, and of different voices. Yet, as I have argued, this perception that social reality is also verbal reality is indebted to the Contemporáneos. Paz describes the urban poetry that Eliot himself credited to two lines by Baudelaire: "Fourmillante Cité, cité pleine de rêves, / Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant" (*TCC*, 127). While it may entertain the larger questions of history, it is a poetry which proceeds from a personal search for a sense of solidity in the self and the world that it perceives. As in his earlier essay, the polemic about history

implies a clearer distinction between the hombres 'reales e irreales' of Eliot and the 'espectros' of Villaurrutia than the discussion actually articulates.

Paz's earliest poems searched for an adequate relation with the world but often found vacancy. He dramatized these two poles by writing in two different modes, sometimes in the same poem: one echoes St. John-Perse and Carlos Pellicer, the other Eliot and Villaurrutia. The affective drama of these poems is then also a negotiation of poetic influence. The dialectical cast of these earliest poems is given new life in the 1940s through the examples of José Juan Tablada, a re-reading of Eliot's poems and the publication of 'La música de la poesía' in *El Hijo Pródigo*. The combination of Tablada's split form and Eliot's advocacy of a dissonant, or contrapuntal, use of colloquial language allows Paz to conduct a dialogue with Antonio Machado, the Juan Ramón Jiménez of *Espacio* and, again, the Contemporáneos. An awareness of the artistic dialogue that Paz's poems conduct does not exclude the project to write a poetry about history, but it does suggest that the intentions behind these poems were more various and less clearly defined than some of the retrospective discussion of 'Poesía e historia' and *Xavier Villaurrutia en persona...* would imply.

One of the most important figures in the artistic dialogue of Paz's poems in the 1940s was the Spanish poet Luis Cernuda. Paz had met Cernuda only briefly in Valencia in 1937, but they were regular correspondents in the following years, and Cernuda's poems had appeared in *Taller*. Cernuda was teaching at the University of Glasgow when Eliot first delivered 'The Music of Poetry' as a lecture on 24 February 1942, and he may well have been the prompt for the translation that appeared shortly after in *El Hijo Pródigo*. In 'Ramón Gómez de la Serna' (1963), Cernuda described Eliot as 'un artista consciente en extremo de las posibilidades de su arte y sus límites', adding that Spanish artists are not temperamentally self-conscious.²³ Cernuda's Eliot is similar to Paz's: verbally restrained and conscious of self and art. Brian Hughes argues that this latter characteristic was decisive in the poems by Cernuda that display Eliot's influence most clearly: 'His own tendency to inflation and verbosity, which he admits was perhaps something he never fully eliminated, diminishes notably in his best poetry from about 1940 onwards.'²⁴

Paz declared in interview that Cernuda had guided his own reading of English poetry: 'Cernuda conocía admirablemente la poesía inglesa y su ejemplo me sirvió para

²³ *Obra completa*, vol. 2 (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 1994), p. 827.

²⁴ *Luis Cernuda and the Modern English Poets* (Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, 1987), p. 191.

penetrar ese mundo.’²⁵ Paz looked after the manuscript of *Como quien espera el alba*, the first of Cernuda’s volumes of poetry to betray a strong Eliot influence, from the summer of 1944.²⁶ It is not always possible to separate the influences of Eliot and Cernuda in Paz’s urban poems of the 1940s. Jason Wilson observes of the line - ‘a lluvia de ceniza en un desierto’ (*LBPI*, 95) - in ‘El muro’, the opening poem of *Puerta condenada*, that it ‘combines both Eliot and Cernuda in “ash” and “desert”’.²⁷ Anthony Stanton attributes the dialogic form of poems such as ‘El joven soldado’ to Paz’s reading of *Como quien espera el alba*. Both poets

adoptan la misma forma del monólogo o soliloquio que se vuelve diálogo interior: el poeta a solas hablando con su doble, su conciencia, su memoria o su imaginación. (*Inventores*, 230)

Although the strong homo-erotic undertones of ‘Árbol quieto entre nubes’ may owe a debt to Cernuda, the form that Paz employs in ‘Conversación en un bar’ is distinct from ‘diálogo interior’, and Stanton concedes that ‘el efecto de un choque entre dos mundos y dos lenguajes’ differs from ‘el estilo meditativo de Cernuda’ (p. 234). The soldiers’ voices are external, and they interrupt the poet’s meditations. In ‘Seven P. M.’, however, Paz does employ the interior dialogue that he finds in Cernuda in conjunction with a number of Eliotic echoes.

The opening lines of ‘Seven P. M.’ recall the London Bridge passage from ‘The Burial of the Dead’:

En filas ordenadas regresamos
y cada noche, cada noche,
mientras hacemos el camino,
el breve infierno de la espera
y el espectro que vierte en el oído:
“¿No tienes sangre ya? ¿Por qué te mientes?
Mira los pájaros...
El mundo tiene playas todavía
y un barco allá te espera, siempre.” (*LBP*, 108-9)

²⁵ ‘Con Octavio Paz y España como tema’, 34. In his inaugural address to a seminar on T. S. Eliot in India, where Paz served with the Mexican diplomatic service from 1962-68, he described Luis Cernuda alongside Pablo Neruda as the two Hispanic poets whose ‘contact with Eliot’s poetry was fruitful’, *T. S. Eliot*, ed. by M. M. Bhalla (Bombay: P. C. Manaktala & Sons, 1965), p. 1. The rest of his address recycles his discussion of Eliot in *El arco y la lira*.

²⁶ *Convergencias* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1991), p. 83.

²⁷ *Octavio Paz* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), p. 30.

Not only does Paz present a similar scene to ‘A crowd flowed over London bridge, so many / I did not think death had undone so many’ (*CPP*, 62), but he offers an approximation to the rhythm of Eliot’s line. The repetition of ‘cada noche’ may also be inspired by Eliot’s repetition of ‘so many’, although Eliot’s use of the phrase at the line-ending as a self-rhyme which tips the rhythm an un-stressed syllable beyond iambic pentameter creates an effect which is simultaneously more elusive and unsettling than the monotony that Paz aims for. Paz also reworks ‘And each man fixed his eyes before his feet’ (*CPP*, 62) which sees ‘eyes’ and ‘feet’ manipulated by their owners as if they were separate objects. Paz gives a similar sense of actions dissociated from the individuals that perform them: ‘Y las piernas caminan’; ‘Y los labios sonríen y saludan’ (*LBP*, 109 & 10).

Paz flirts with the source of this passage in Dante, switching limbo for ‘el breve infierno de la espera’. Paz, however, did not subscribe to the Christian scheme and the allusion is tightly controlled: the epithet ‘breve’ trivialises this inferno. It is clearly marked as ironic. Nevertheless, he confirms the perspective that casts the crowd as lost souls in hell, calling them ‘condenados solitarios’. He extends the analogy with the introduction of a spectre, a disembodied voice which taunts the human. This is a true example of the interior dialogue that Stanton attributes to Cernuda, although it also recalls ‘The Journey of the Magi’: ‘con voces al oído que cantaban: / esto es una locura’.²⁸ Not only does Cernuda influence the form, however, but the spectre’s voice itself employs images that are distinctly Cernudan:

Cuerpos dorados como el pan dorado
y el vino de labios morados
y el agua, desnudez... (*LBP*, 110)

Stanton describes the contrast in Paz’s poems of this period between an infernal urban world and ‘un espacio mítico y paradisiáco, un lugar abierto a los deseos y repleto de imágenes cernudianas de cuerpos dorados, playa y mar’ (*Inventores*, 232). Yet these passages in ‘Seven P. M.’ do not deliver a paradisiacal world. They are spoken by a spectre to a consciousness that is in Hell; that is, they taunt that consciousness with a paradise that is beyond it. The parody of Christian communion that these ‘cuerpos dorados como el pan dorado’ represent only serves to enforce the main speaker’s distance from redemption. As in ‘Conversación en un bar’, Paz has placed lyric passages

²⁸ Trans. by Manuel Altolaguirre, “1616”, 8.

in a context which renders them ineffectual. The promise of sea and bronzed bodies is negated by means of a Cernudan 'ceniza':

Y las piernas caminan
y una roja marea
inunda playas de ceniza. (*LBP*, 109)

In 'Razones para morir', metaphors such as 'La libertad es alas' provided a means of assertion. Here, the figurative language is infected with despair, and anger. It is closer to the bracketed passages of 'Conversación en un bar'. The poetic image is no longer a means of praising the world, or a form of grace, but the means through which despair takes possession of the poet. The poem's subject becomes the failure of the lyric voice that I have traced from Paz's earliest poems.

'Seven P. M.' concludes with an offer of release that is similarly degraded:

Y el hombre aprieta el paso
y al tiempo justo de llegar a tiempo
doblan la esquina, puntuales, Dios y el tranvía. (*LBP*, 110)

The tautology of the second line recalls Prufrock's 'prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet' (*CPP*, 14), and also the 'parejas pares' of López Velarde (*Obras*, 207). It serves to trivialize the final line: yearning for divine grace amounts to the same as rushing for a tram since both are forms of expectation. Paz's habitual resort to lyric epiphany as a moment of freedom is undermined by a context that renders the promise of the Cernudan passages empty.

'Seven P. M.' suggests a desire for some form of religious belief at the same time as it expresses dissatisfaction with the available Christian scheme. Paz was no longer willing to orient his life and work in terms of the political left, and the pseudo-religious rhetoric that had always been an aspect of his work becomes more prominent in the early 1940s. I have discussed Cernuda's formal and imagistic influence on 'Seven P. M.', but Anthony Stanton describes a common attitude towards poetry that is broadly religious: 'subrayan una idea ética de la poesía como aventura espiritual de autoconocimiento' (*Inventores*, 224). Both poets shared what Paz described as Cernuda's 'ateísmo religioso' (*Cuadriodio*, 196). A number of the poems of *Libertad bajo palabra* summon a God whom they deny. 'El ausente', for example, exclaims, 'no existes, pero vives, / en nuestra angustia habitas, / en el fondo vacío del instante / [...]

Dios vacío, Dios sordo, Dios mío' (*LBP*, 38-9); and 'Soliloquio de medianoche' refers to the 'elocuentes vejigas ya sin nada: / Dios, Cielo, Amistad, Revolución o Patria' (*LBP*, 28).

In 'Ni el cielo ni la tierra', this paradoxical dependence on, and rejection of, a broadly Christian scheme reaches an impasse. The early Eliot had chastised a romanticism that 'stands for excess in any direction. It splits up into two directions: escape from the world of brute fact, and devotion to the brute fact'.²⁹ 'Ni el cielo ni la tierra' confronts this inherited split, rejecting both sides of it with the repeated injunction 'Atrás, tierra o cielo', a form of exorcism traditionally directed at the devil - 'Atrás demonio'. The use of a Christian rhetoric betrays the impossibility of escape from this inheritance at the same time as Paz tries to reject it. He directs his anger against a number of objects, among them the poet's self - 'Atrás mis uñas y mis dientes...' (*LBP*, 15) - or rather, those parts of his self that connect him with the world. Eliot, in a conflation of a historical figure and Ovid's 'spiritual celibate' (*AOP*, xxiii), had portrayed a St. Narcissus divided from the world by a self-consciousness that made 'his hands aware of the tips of his fingers'.³⁰ However, it is not the tips of his fingers and his eyes, paths to 'la realidad sensible' and, in the case of eyes, beyond (windows on the soul), that Paz rejects, but 'uñas' y 'dientes', not in themselves sensible; in fact, the weapons of an animal rather than human attributes. The earlier violence that expressed itself as yearning has here become disgust and loathing, turned on the world and against the self.

One might expect Eliot to be summoned in these poems as a model of religious orthodoxy who could then be rejected. However, Paz still calls on an Eliot who negates belief rather than one who asserts it. 'Ni el cielo ni la tierra' expresses a hostility towards the available means of understanding the poet's situation and ultimately turns its anger on the poet's own self. 'La sombra' looks for a way beyond that impasse through a journey into darkness:

Ya por cambiar de piel o por tenerla
nos acogemos a lo oscuro,
que nos viste de sombra
la carne desollada.

²⁹ *Syllabus of a Course of Six Lectures on Modern French Literature*, 1916; reproduced in A. David Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot, Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 43.

³⁰ *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Draft of the Original Transcripts* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971), p. 95.

En los ojos abiertos
cae la sombra y luego son los ojos
los que en la sombra caen
y es unos ojos líquidos la sombra.

¡En esos ojos anegarse,
no ser sino esos ojos
que no ven, que acarician
como las olas si son alas,
como las olas si son labios!

Pero los ojos de la sombra
en nuestros ojos se endurecen
y arañemos el muro o resbalemos
por la roca, la sombra nos rechaza:
en esa piedra no hay olvido. (*LBP*, 107)

Paz conflates the repeated references to eyes and the 'Falls the shadow' of *The Hollow Men* as it is rendered in León Felipe's translation:

Entre la idea
y la realidad
entre el movimiento
y el acto
cae la sombra. (Felipe, 135-6)

Eliot used 'Falls the shadow' to provide an image of division, and his 'eyes I dare not meet in dreams' were an invitation to confront, or relate, which he could not meet. Paz stares willingly into the shadow, but he does not make progress. He reverses the terms of his image so that the eyes fall into the shadow, then the shadow becomes a pair of eyes. 'En esos anegarse' suggests an erotic situation, losing oneself in another's eyes, as Eliot's speaker could not. Yet 'los ojos de la sombra se endurecen'. His sense of confinement is reinforced by the tight patterns of assonance - 'luego son los ojos / los que en la sombra caen', 'no ser sino esos ojos' - which Paz could also have found in 'Los hombres huecos': 'No se ven estos ojos: / Mirad, los ojos son...', 'Los ojos no están aquí. / No hay ojos aquí...' (Felipe, 133 & 34). Ultimately he is cast out: 'la sombra nos rechaza'.

As the poem continues Paz forgoes the outright denial of other poems in favour of a more agnostic acceptance of emptiness and a moment where 'todo está presente'.

His early writing was uncomfortable with states of vacancy but he now appears resigned:

Nada fue ayer, nada mañana,
todo es presente, todo está presente,
y cae no sabemos en qué pozos,
ni si detrás de ese sinfin
aguarda Dios, o el Diablo,
o simplemente Nadie. (*LBP*, 108)

He then concludes with a move which, anticipating his later poems, does not attempt to resolve the feelings of entrapment, exclusion and vacancy that he has experienced, but broadens his perspective to observe himself in the act of writing about these experiences:

Huímos a la luz que no nos miente
y en un papel cualquiera
escribimos palabras sin respuesta.
Y enrojecen a veces
las líneas azules, y nos duelen. (*LBP*, 108)

Those words still have the power to cause pain, but Paz seems to have found distance from the anger and exclamatory tone of 'Ni el cielo ni la tierra'. The syntax of 'La sombra' is much closer to the measured construction of *The Hollow Men* or Villaurrutia's poems, or parts one and five of *Ash-Wednesday*. The movement from exclamation to litany implies not so much a resolution of difficult experience as a desire to ritualize it and to find a form in which it can be contemplated. A moment in which 'todo está presente' suggests a meditative experience that provides an alternative to Paz's more common experience in the United States: 'Es un desierto circular el mundo, / el cielo está cerrado y el infierno vacío' (*LBP*, 123).

Paz's Eliotic poems of the United States still depend for their images and formal experiment on *The Hollow Men* and *The Waste Land*, which he had first read nearly fifteen years earlier. The moment of 'La sombra' in which 'todo está presente', however, calls to mind 'all time is eternally present' in *Burnt Norton* (*CPP*, 171). At some time between August and December of 1945 Paz came across Eliot's final poetic work:

Cuando aparecieron los *Four Quartets* yo vivía en Nueva York; leí en algún diario una nota bibliográfica sobre el nuevo libro de Eliot y me precipité a la librería más cercana para comprar un ejemplar. Todavía lo guardo. Leí el libro con entusiasmo e incluso con fervor. La impresión que me causó – tenía yo entonces treinta años – fue muy distinta a la que me había producido *The Waste Land*. Creo que *Four Quartets* es uno de los grandes poemas de este siglo y su repetida lectura me ha enriquecido poética y espiritualmente; sin embargo, no ha tenido – no podía tenerla – la influencia que tuvo *The Waste Land* en mi formación poética.³¹

Paz had read Eliot's earlier major poems in translation, often a number of years after their first publication in English. Now he was reading *Four Quartets* 'con fervor' as it appeared in American bookshops. One senses bemusement and a little disappointment in a response that was 'distinta a la que me había producido *The Waste Land*'. It is as if he didn't quite know what to make of this new poem, and the assertion that follows, that '*Four Quartets* es uno de los grandes poemas de este siglo', sounds a little hollow, even if his reference to 'repetida lectura' suggests that it is a poem he persisted with.

Paz would not have come to *Four Quartets* without any forewarning. *El Hijo Pródigo* published a substantial essay on Eliot's poem by Rodolfo Usigli, who had provided the translation of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' for the *Taller* collection.³² As a dramatist, Usigli was particularly interested in Eliot's use of colloquial language, which had also preoccupied Paz after the publication of 'La música de la poesía'.³³ Usigli describes Eliot's negative debt to Whitman 'por herencia inversa', 'el sentido de todo lo que no hay que hacer en poesía, de la repetición que hay que evitar, de la economía' (Usigli, 89), virtues which in Spanish America provided an alternative to the 'exaltación lírica' of Neruda. Usigli refers to the 'modalidades dialogísticas' of Eliot's earlier poems (p. 88), which Paz himself was experimenting with. However, he then compares the *Quartets* to the earlier poems and detects 'el mismo poeta, llegado al fin a su monólogo' (p. 90). Paz may well have been reluctant to accept a reading of this new poem which contradicted the very aspect of Eliot that his own work had invested in. He later described:

³¹ 'T. S. Eliot: mínima evocación', in *Al paso* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1992), p. 18. This passage did not appear in the original version of this article that was published as 'T. S. Eliot' in *Vuelta* (1988).

³² 'Los cuartetos de T. S. Eliot y la poesía impopular', *El Hijo Pródigo*, 2, 8 (15 noviembre 1943), 89-94.

³³ Eliot claimed in interview that his own experience of 'writing plays [...] made a difference to the writing of the *Four Quartets* [...] It led to a greater simplification of language and to speaking in a way which is more like conversing with your reader', Donald Hall, 'T. S. Eliot', in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, Second Series* (New York: Viking, 1965), p. 104-5.

El poema extenso concebido no como un monólogo sino como una estructura musical, a la manera de los *Cuartetos* de Eliot, compuesta por variaciones de un tema único: la conciencia solitaria frente a la nada. (*Sombras*, 72)

In interview, he referred to the final stage of Eliot's career, in which 'se vuelve hacia anglicismo en religión', as 'el que menos me interesa' (*PC*, 23). However, in 'Poesía e historia' not only does Paz attenuate Usigli's 'monólogo' but he also secularizes the poem's theme: 'la conciencia solitaria frente a la nada'. Usigli himself had praised the 'ardor religioso' of López Velarde and Eliot, but then clarified:

La poesía es un asunto que está entre el poeta, árbol del hombre, y Dios, raíz del hombre. No hago propaganda católica aun cuando Eliot la haya hecho anglicana. No digo Dios en un sentido dogmático o hagiográfico, ni, menos aún, en un sentido de origen y de fin. De Dios y del verbo, que fue su primera forma. (p. 94)

Usigli's non-dogmatic God is compatible with the 'ateísmo religioso' that Paz found in a Cernuda whom he linked closely to Eliot. Usigli's article echoes Paz's own pseudo-religious rhetoric, in the reference to 'raíz del hombre' above, and earlier to the search for origins:

La originalidad de este poeta, mejor que como de una originalidad lírica o metafórica, como de una necesidad de establecer orígenes para todas las cosas, orígenes que son a la vez un punto de partida y una meta. (p. 89)

Usigli also gives strong encouragement to a reading of *Four Quartets* as a meditation on a *Deus absconditus* by suggesting that Eliot had influenced the two major Mexican exponents of a poetry of absences: Xavier Villaurrutia and José Gorostiza, in particular the Gorostiza of *Muerte sin fin* (1939) (p. 94).

Anthony Stanton notes the influence of *The Waste Land* in the use of song and the 'sardónica intervención del coloquialismo' (*Inventores*, 84) at the end of *Muerte sin fin*: '¡Anda, putilla del rubor helado, / anda, vámonos al diablo!'.³⁴ Yet, on the whole, Gorostiza's poem is closer to the meditative manner of *Four Quartets* than to the dramatic vignettes of *The Waste Land*. In fact, in the chapter that Mordecai Rubín dedicates to 'Gorostiza y los temas de T. S. Eliot' he quotes repeatedly from Eliot's later poem, even though he accepts that it appeared too late to be an actual influence.³⁵

³⁴ *Poesía completa*, 149.

³⁵ *Una poética moderna: Muerte sin fin de Gorostiza: análisis y comentario* (México: UNAM, 1966), p. 196.

Muerte sin fin is then a precursor of *Four Quartets*, one that, like Paz's 'conciencia solitaria frente a la nada', addresses an absent God:

...que sigues presente
como una estrella mentida
por su sola luz, por una
luz sin estrella, vacía,
que llega al mundo escondiendo
su catástrofe infinita. (Gorostiza, 149)

Rubín detects a similar method in the work of both poets: 'los dos proceden por el método de los antiguos neoplatónicos que perseguían la verdad por la negación sucesiva de lo falso' (Rubín, 189). In *Four Quartets*, this negative way is represented by San Juan de la Cruz: lines 114-121 of *Burnt Norton* summarize his 'active purgation'; Part Three of *East Coker* – 'O dark, dark, dark. They all go into the dark...' – concludes with an adaptation from the *Subida del Monte Carmelo* (I. xiii); and Ronald Schuchard describes the Spanish mystic as one of 'the presiding spirits' of *Little Gidding* (p. 186).³⁶ When I discussed *Four Quartets* with Homero Aridjis, one of the Mexican poets who emerged in the 1960s under Paz's tutelage, he singled out what he described as 'una lectura muy fresca de San Juan' in Eliot's poem. Paz would certainly have been aware of San Juan after he had participated in the conference of 1942 to celebrate four hundred years from the birth of the Spanish mystic. In the essay that came out of that conference, 'Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión', he contrasted San Juan as a poet of communion with Francisco de Quevedo as a representative of excision from God's grace, staring into 'las aguas del abismo'. As I have argued, Paz's earliest poems make use of Eliot to negate belief, and he associates Eliot with this Heideggerian Quevedo. His reading of *Four Quartets* as 'la conciencia solitaria frente a la nada' continues his reading of the earlier poems. Yet, in order to read the later poem in this manner, Eliot's San Juan must occupy the role that was attributed to Quevedo in 'Poesía de soledad...'.³⁷ This shuffling of personnel in the Pazian scheme is not as startling as it might at first appear. Both Paz's Quevedo and Eliot's San Juan represent a form of *via negativa*, an inherently open concept since it describes the way towards God rather than

³⁶ For the translations that Eliot used see Helen Gardner, ed., *The Composition of Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), pp. 42, 89 & 107.

³⁷ Ángel Flores, however, had suggested a link between San Juan and states of vacancy in *The Waste Land*: 'Llega un momento cuando San Juan de la Cruz, desorbitado, tartamudea... y momentos hay en *Tierra Baldía* cuando Eliot se ve obligado a recurrir a presentimientos Védicos o a mirar pavorosamente las entrañas blancas del silencio' (p. 9).

arrival. Whether it leads ultimately to God or to an absence, as in *Muerte sin fin*, is not its concern since it is a 'way of dispossession' (CPP, 181). In an essay of 1950 on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *Primero sueño*, Paz demonstrates the thinking that is necessary to secularize the San Juan of *Four Quartets*: '*Primero sueño* no es el poema del conocimiento, sino *del acto de conocer*' (Peras, 48). It is not the end of understanding that matters but the passage towards it. Just as Heidegger had suggested that 'El preguntar metafísico' was a question that '*Nos preguntamos, aquí y ahora, para nosotros*' (Heidegger, 86), so Paz turns the religious question into an epistemological one. It is a significant turn for his own poetry, and has an application to his political beliefs as well as his lack of belief in a deity. He had grown to appreciate that the ends of the left did not justify the means – the Hitler-Stalin pact and the assassination of Trotsky could not be excused in the name of a historical progress towards revolution. The 'history' of the left was denied its teleology and Eliot's poem was denied its God. Paz's reading of Sor Juana's poem, itself a model for *Muerte sin fin*, as a '*noche construida a pulso sobre el vacío*' (Peras, 48), is almost identical to his later reading of *Four Quartets*. Paz was able to apply his reading of Eliot's earlier poems as the work of a negating consciousness to the later poem by exploiting the ambiguous nature of San Juan's *via negativa*. However, in his earliest poems, Paz is reluctant to follow the way of negation, and in his prose he argues for the value of belief, or a 'tesis'. Although he never expresses a belief in God, his later poems do adopt such mystical expressions as '*se reconcilian las dos mitades enemigas*' (LBP, 129) that attest to a compensating way of possession.

In an essay published in a collection that Paz refers to in *El arco y la lira* (ArcoI, 76), Helen Gardner argues that *Burnt Norton*'s Christianity is not dogmatic:

Burnt Norton does not suggest any dogma: its lyric movement, with its halting tentative rhythms, is purely natural in its theme and images. The subject of the poem is an experience for which theology provides an explanation and on which religion builds a discipline, the immediate apprehension of a timeless reality, felt in time and remembered in time, the sudden revelation of 'the one end, which is always present'. It is in the third section only that the poem suggests another way to the stillness at the heart of movement, by a deliberate descent into the world of perpetual solitude, the negative way. Christianity has found room in itself for both types of mystical experience, that which finds all nature a theophany, and that which feels the truth of Pascal's favourite text: '*Vere tu es Deus absconditus*'.³⁸

³⁸ T. S. Eliot: *A Study of his Writings by Several Hands* (London: Dobson, 1947), p. 63.

Gardner notes the negative way, and also the presence of natural imagery, but it is 'The point of intersection of the timeless / With time' (CPP, 190-1) that she identifies as the poem's subject. Manuel Ulacia quotes the opening of *Burnt Norton* -

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable (CPP, 171)

- and compares it to Paz's 'Cuarto de hotel':

Arde el tiempo fantasma:
arde el ayer, el hoy se quema y el mañana.
Todo lo que soñé dura un minuto
y es un minuto todo lo vivido. (LBP, 117)

He concludes that 'los dos poetas han utilizado la misma concepción del tiempo. Paz la ha encontrado en Eliot y en Proust; Eliot y Proust, en Bergson.' (*Árbol*, 114-15). It is debatable whether Bergson is as direct an influence on *Four Quartets* as he is on Eliot's earlier poems. The claim that Paz 'found' this conception of time in Eliot must also be treated with caution. Time appears as an explicit theme in Paz's poems before he reads *Four Quartets*. In 'Crepúsculos de la ciudad' of 1942, for example:

Abre el tiempo la entraña de lo vivo
y en la hondura del pulso fugitivo
se precipita el hombre desangrado

¡Vértigo del minuto consumado! (p. 3)

In the 1942 edition of *Raíz del hombre*, a time appears that is 'una muerte de los tiempos', a 'moment in and out of time':

Y se agolpan los tiempos
y vuelven al origen de los días
[...] la vida gira en ese instante. (AOM, 63).

Time is arrested, yet there is movement in stillness – 'la vida gira en ese instante' – as in another poem of *Raíz del hombre*:

Más acá de la música y la danza,

aquí, en la inmovilidad,
sitio de la música tensa,
bajo el gran árbol de mi sangre,
tú reposas. Yo estoy desnudo
y en mis venas golpea la fuerza,
hija de la inmovilidad. (AOM, 57)

Such moments of epiphany were clearly well established in Paz's poems before he read *Four Quartets*. In fact, Ulacia himself in his discussion of *Primer día* (1935-1936) attributes the theme of time, 'entendido éste como la relación de la eternidad del instante con la fugacidad del momento', to Paz's reading of Quevedo (*Árbol*, 47). Nevertheless, the fact that Paz was already so preoccupied with this theme must have guaranteed that he would respond to its appearance in Eliot's poem. His own 'sitio de la música tensa' finds confirmation in Eliot's analogy of music and Chinese jar:

...Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness. (CPP, 175)

His interest in Eliot's use of time as theme was also confirmed by other Hispanic poets. Fernando Ortiz suggests that Eliot's 'moment in and out of time' influenced Cernuda's notion of 'acorde' which appeared in *Ocnos* (a volume that Paz reviewed in 1943):

El instante intemporal queda sustraído al tiempo, y en ese instante intemporal se divisa la sombra de un gozo intemporal, cifra de todos los goces terrestres que estuvieran al alcance.³⁹

Mordecai Rubín offers Eliot's 'the intense moment' and Gorostiza's 'un minuto, quizá, que se enardece', perhaps the source for 'el hoy se quema' of 'Cuarto de hotel', among a number of examples of time in the two poets' works (Rubín, 193).

Given Paz's own interest in time as theme even before he read *Four Quartets*, and his impatience to clear up the 'tesis', or belief, aspect of his poems, it is no surprise that time appears repeatedly in his subsequent poetry and prose. Eliot's meditation on this theme is also linked to a theme which obsessed Paz, history: 'A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history.'⁴⁰ More than the theme itself, however, the

³⁹ 'Eliot en Cernuda', *Vuelta*, 124 (marzo 1987), p. 34.

⁴⁰ 'Choruses from *The Rock*' (CPP, 160). Patrick O. Dudgeon quoted this source for the *Four Quartets* in 'Los cuartetos de T. S. Eliot', *Sur*, 146 (diciembre 1946), p. 42.

fact that the *Four Quartets* includes conscious theorizing in conjunction with lyrical passages provides a model that suits a natural tendency of Paz's own temperament. It permits an interpenetration of two types of thinking and writing that are habitually confined to either poetry or prose. In his early writing, Paz resisted the *artepurista* version of the modernist aesthetic of presentation which was hostile to interpretive comment within the poem. In *Four Quartets*, Paz found a model sanctioned by the author who had introduced him to modern poetry of a work that included such comment. Although Paz described Eliot's later poem in 1973 as 'un regreso hacia una poesía anterior a *The Waste Land*' (PC, 24), it suited his own ambivalence about the version of the vanguardia that the Contemporáneos represented.⁴¹

Paz's move to the United States compounded an isolation which was both intellectual – the broadly political system of belief on which he relied had proved unacceptable – and social as he severed contacts with various former *compañeros de ruta*. The poems of *Asueto*, which he composed in his first months away from Mexico, attempted to compensate with a delight in the natural world, but the void could not be filled so easily. The poems that follow express various states of disaffection which bear a strong imprint of his Eliot reading. He retrospectively describes this influence as formal, and the impulse for his development of *simultaneísmo*. Yet, as I have argued, while 'Conversación en un bar' employs a dialogic form which is inspired by 'The Music of Poetry', and Mangua's introduction to 'El páramo' as well as *The Waste Land*, 'Seven P.M.' employs a form of interior dialogue which is more properly Cernudan, in spite of certain allusions to Eliot's poem. Eliot clearly is a formal influence on these poems, yet he is also a more diffuse presence which expresses a state of intellectual and emotional impasse. Just as Paz's earliest writing hovered between admiration for a poetry that could express this state and a search for a means to escape it, so he struggled in the United States for a way out. 'La sombra' proposes one form of compromise, an awareness of his entrapment that can ritualize the experience and so

⁴¹ In spite of the many similarities, in content and method, between the *Four Quartets* and Paz's own poems, he never shared Luis Cernuda's view: 'Cuatro Cuartetos ("Four Quartets") es de una trascendencia extraordinaria y es en ella donde Eliot se ha logrado mejor desde el punto de vista del lenguaje. ¡Qué lenguaje más rico! ¡Qué exactitud y qué precisión en el concepto!' (*Obra completa* 3, 788). In his essay of 1965 on Cernuda, Paz recalled, 'A Cernuda ese poema le parecía lo mejor que había escrito Eliot y varias veces discutimos las razones de esta preferencia, pues yo me inclinaba por *The Waste Land*' (*Cuadrivio*, 124).

contemplate it. It is in 'Himno entre ruinas', however, a poem which culminates his recent experiments with *simultaneísmo*, that he attempts to excise this Eliotic presence. The poem was composed in 1948, after Paz had been transferred to the Mexican embassy in Paris, but it provides a form of conclusion to his output in the United States; it comprised the final section of his collection *Libertad bajo palabra* (1949) in which the poems that I have discussed in this chapter were collected. Ramón Xirau describes it as a watershed: 'termina una primera época y comienza la de sus grandes poemas'.⁴²

Like the poems of *Asueto*, 'Himno entre ruinas' opens with praise of the external world:

Coronado de sí el día extiende sus plumas.
¡Alto grito amarillo,
caliente surtidor en el centro de un cielo
imparcial y benéfico! (*LBP*, 126)

Yet the praise is paradoxical. The opening line plays a game in which the qualifier 'coronado' is presented before the object that it qualifies; in fact, it elaborates tautologically - 'coronado de sí' - before the reader can refer the meaning to 'el día'. Paz's syntax dramatizes a situation in which linguistic meaning is appended to, rather than found in, the world; yet, this appended meaning claims that the world is self-sufficient - 'coronado de sí el día...'. The statement's import denies its status as language. Ramón Xirau detects that the claim to have found a world of 'identidades perfectas' results from the poet's isolation: 'Aislado y desnudo, alejado de la inmediatez concreta, la fantasía inventa un universo de identidades perfectas' (p. 45). The poet and the world he observes are discrete entities: 'Igual a sí mismo el poeta ve un mundo también igual a sí mismo' (pp. 45-6). Xirau reads the epistemology of the passage convincingly, yet he fails to account for the role of the poet's desire in this situation. If the poet were really self-sufficient, surely he would not need to find unity in the world, nor to praise it; he seems to need this external unity in order himself to feel whole. The syntactic game of the opening line does not so much describe wholeness as dramatize the act of desiring it, a desire that bespeaks division and dependence on a world beyond the self which, precisely because of the poet's own interest in the transaction, fails to materialize as an objective reality. The paradoxical nature of his attempt materializes instead as a restless shift of vehicle and attention:

⁴² Octavio Paz: *El sentido de la palabra* (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1970), p. 44.

Las apariencias son hermosas en esta su verdad
 momentánea.
 El mar trepa la costa,
 se afianza entre las peñas, araña deslumbrante;
 la herida cárdena del monte resplandece;
 un puñado de cabras es un rebaño de piedras;
 el sol pone su huevo de oro y se derrama sobre
 el mar.
 Todo es dios.
 ¡Estatua rota,
 columnas comidas por la luz,
 ruinas vivas en un mundo de muertos en vida! (*LBP*, 126)

Rather than illustrating the bald statement of ‘Las apariencias son hermosas’, the string of metaphorical observations that follow confirms its inadequacy. Each observation slides into another, and the passage runs through a bewildering range of feeling - from the security of ‘se afianza’ to the threat of ‘araña’, pain of ‘herida cárdena’, deliberation of ‘pone’, and excess of ‘se derrama’ - with no sense of orderly relation between them. When the totalizing vision of ‘Todo es dios’ attempts to arrest the descriptive trawl, the speaker’s attention slides once more to a local observation, and another shift of emotion, as the dismayed ‘ruinas vivas’ usher a transition from praise to the lament of the second stanza.

John M. Fein observes of the first stanza that ‘predomina en todo ello la nota decorativa’,⁴³ which would suggest that Luis de Góngora, whose *Polifemo y Galatea* provides an epigraph for the poem – ‘Donde espumoso el mar siciliano’ – informs the debate I have traced between a language that would praise and a language that supplements, or effaces, nature. Paz certainly mentioned Góngora’s presence as, ‘en nuestra tradición, el gran poeta solar de la vida’ (‘Genealogía’, 20-1). Yet this Góngora would only account for the attempt to praise the midday world; he does not open up the ambivalence of the poem. A more recent work provided the conflict on which ‘Himno’ turns: Paul Valéry’s *Le Cimetière marin*, a poem which, according to Homero Aridjis, completed the triad of modern long poems read in Mexico of the 1930s alongside *Anabase* and *The Waste Land*. The profile of Valéry’s poem was greatly enhanced in

⁴³ ‘Himno entre ruinas’, in *Aproximaciones a Octavio Paz*, ed. by Ángel Flores (México: Joaquín Mortíz, 1974), p. 166.

Spanish by Jorge Guillén's translation of 1929, 'una obra maestra' according to Paz.⁴⁴ In 'Poesía e historia' Paz praised the poem for its communication with the outside world:

El cementerio marino nos seduce, precisamente, por la realidad del mundo físico que refleja – la ola, las barcas, las rocas, los pinos, el insecto pulido por la sequía – frente a la realidad, no menos real, de la conciencia de la muerte. (*Sombras*, 59)

Valéry observes a similar scene to Paz, in which a 'mediodía justo enciende el mar' and the poet can 'mirar por fin la calma de los dioses'.⁴⁵ The gesture of standing back from the scene in 'Me place este lugar' (p. 51), accompanied by a slight relaxation of tone, could well have provided the suggestion for Paz's own 'las apariencias son hermosas...'. As in Paz, Valéry's midday is seemingly self-sufficient: 'Y qué paz, ah, parece concebirse' (p. 43); 'El mediodía / En sí se piensa y conviene consigo...' (p. 53). Yet the application of thinking verbs – 'concebirse' and 'se piensa' – to the natural world suggest a human interaction that upsets that world's self-sufficiency. Like Paz, Valéry suggests that an attempt to identify with a completion in the outside world is suspect, since the attempt is itself a symptom of human incompleteness. Like Paz, he attempts to find a measure outside himself – 'A esta pureza subo y me acostumbro' (p. 45) – yet he concludes that, rather than adopting the completion of the world, he detracts from it: 'Yo soy en ti la secreta mudanza // [...] Mi contrición, mis dudas, mis aprietos / Son el defecto de tu gran diamante' (pp. 54-5).

Valéry maintains a stricter focus on the relationship between mind and world, however, than Paz. The second stanza of 'Himno entre ruinas', distinguished from the first by the use of italics, both expands upon Valéry's theme and makes explicit a battle with poetic influence:

*Cae la noche sobre Teotihuacán.
En lo alto de la pirámide los muchachos fuman
marihuana,
suenan guitarras roncas.
¿Qué yerba, qué agua de vida ha de darnos la
vida,
dónde desenterrar la palabra,
la proporción que rige al himno y al discurso,
al baile, a la ciudad y a la balanza?* (LBP, 126-7)

⁴⁴ *In/mediaciones* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1990), p. 81.

⁴⁵ *El cementerio marino*, trans. by Jorge Guillén (Madrid: Alianza, 1970), p. 41.

The influence that these italicized stanzas embody is clearly Eliot's. The questions recall the 'Son of man...' passage of 'The Burial of the Dead' - 'What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow...?' (CPP, 61). '*Nueva York, Londres, Moscú*' in the fourth stanza almost quotes 'What the Thunder Said'.⁴⁶ This Eliot places the conflict of stanza one in a specific historical context – the ruins of Teotihuacán which also allude to the ruin of post-war Europe.⁴⁷ Not only does this stanza contextualize conflict, but it also diagnoses it: contemporary civilization lacks '*la proporción que rige al himno y al discurso...*'. In *El arco y la lira*, Paz uses this verb 'regir' to describe Eliot's *Waste Land*: a unified vision is replaced by 'el automatismo de la asociación de ideas, que no está regido por ningún ritmo cósmico o espiritual, sino por el azar' (*Arco1*, 77). Yet, although Paz's Eliot provides a diagnosis of the conflict in 'Himno', it is not a diagnosis that Paz heeds.

The next stanza does not offer any form of proportion, a structure that can order experience. It looks instead to sensual relation as a point of departure:

Los ojos ven, las manos tocan.
 Bastan aquí unas cuantas cosas:
 tuna, espinoso planeta coral,
 higos encapuchados,
 uvas con gusto a resurrección,
 almejas, virginidades ariscas,
 sal, queso, vino, pan solar. (*LBP*, 127)

The figurative language is more cautious now, as if the effusions of the poem's opening had been chastened by the intervention of the Eliotic passage: 'Uvas con gusto a resurrección' tactfully suggests a desire for grace without being too explicit about its possibility. 'Gusto' can be read two ways, both of which temper the pretensions of the image: either it is taste as in a brief sample rather than a full encounter; or it can be taste as in a sensual apprehension rather than a spiritual one. The poet's attention is more steadily fixed on the material world, and the progression of the passage is more certain as a result - in the world of the senses a few things are enough, and he lists them. There is no equivalent of the jump in stanza one from the waywardly metaphorical inventory of the landscape to the totalizing generalization of 'Todo es dios'.

The alternation of 'Himno' between stanzas of sensual relation and critical consciousness already operated, although less explicitly, in Paz's earliest poems which

⁴⁶ 'Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London / Unreal' (CPP, 73).

⁴⁷ Paz described 'Himno' as 'un poema escrito después de la segunda guerra mundial [...] por todas partes los escombros de las ciudades modernas se superponían a las de la antigüedad' ('Genealogía', 20-1).

played off Pellicer and St.-John Perse against Eliot and Villaurrutia. Paz praised Pellicer in terms that echo his own poem: 'Tuvo siempre los sentidos despiertos: ver, oír, tocar, oler, gustar' (*Sombras*, 76). In a later essay on the translator of *El cementerio marino*, Paz reads Jorge Guillén as a bridge between the two separate attitudes, the 'classical' and the sensual:

Por sus inclinaciones clásicas Guillén hace pensar en un Eliot mediterráneo [...] Hay algo [...] que lo separa radicalmente de Eliot: en su obra apenas si hay huellas de cristianismo. Su tema es sensual e intelectual: el mundo tocado por los sentidos y la mente. Poesía profundamente mediterránea. (*In/med*, 81)

Paz actually makes little of the 'inclinaciones clásicas' in Guillén's work, and it can be argued that his praise of the senses sidesteps the call of the Eliotic stanza for 'la proporción que rige' – structures of belief are rejected in favour of a direct relationship. 'Himno entre ruinas' is not simplistic, however. It develops the premise of sensual relation further, and in a direction that Paz observes in Guillén's 'Más allá' (1928):

La realidad última no es ni material ni ideal: es un querer, una relación, un intercambio. Estamos ante un realismo paradójico pues se sustenta en la afirmación del instante como eternidad. (*In/med*, 93)

In 'Himno', the historical, religious ruins of stanza two are answered by a momentary vision - 'la luz crea templos en el mar' – and 'la proporción que rige' by senses 'en la hora viva':

Ver, tocar formas hermosas, diarias.
Zumba la luz, dardos y alas.
Huele a sangre la mancha de vino en el mantel.
Como el coral sus ramas en el agua
extiendiendo mis sentidos en la hora viva. (*LBP*, 128)

Paz is working with a particular idea of Eliot and, in fact, his vision of 'el instante' has a notable antecedent in the 'moment in and out of time' of *Four Quartets*. Paz uses one Eliot against another.

The intellectualizing, diagnostic Eliot that Pellicer and Guillén answer is as much a projection of one aspect of Paz's own self, and the italicized stanzas conclude in reflection:

Mis pensamientos se bifurcan, serpean, se enredan,

*recomienzan,
y al fin se inmovilizan, ríos que no desembocan,
delta de sangre bajo un sol sin crepúsculo (LBP, 128)*

As I have argued, Paz admired Eliot as a poet who addressed questions of meaning and belief. The danger of this emphasis is that beliefs can trample the local epiphanies and felicities of language on which a hymn depends. Paz mused of Pellicer that ‘tal vez pensó poco’, and added, ‘¿Qué importa?’ (*Sombras*, 76). The hostility that he displays here towards a search for ‘la proporción que rige...’, or for a philosophical solution to problems that were in part affective, is not resolved finally. The conflict continues throughout his career.

The final stanza resolves sensual contact with the world into metaphor, and then talks about that resolution:

¡Día, redondo día,
luminosa naranja de veinticuatro gajos,
todos atravesados por una misma y amarilla
dulzura!
La inteligencia al fin encarna en formas,
se reconcilian las dos mitades enemigas
y la conciencia-espejo se licúa,
vuelve a ser fuente, manantial de fábulas:
Hombre, árbol de imágenes,
palabras que son flores que son frutos que son
actos. (*LBP*, 129)

This does not exactly make contact with the day that the poet had been cast out from in the opening stanza; it manages instead to create an image of it that is alive to the senses. The round day is an orange, an orange one can open and whose segments one can count and taste – they are sweet.⁴⁸ Paz then takes a step back from this process in order to describe it: ‘La inteligencia al fin encarna en formas [...] y la conciencia espejo se licúa’. The shift of perspective is dramatic, and sets a precedent for much of Paz’s later poetry, which frequently observes the psychological processes of its own composition. As I have argued, this turn is authorized by the more reflective manner of *Four Quartets*. Yet there is a danger of loss as well as gain. The reader is told that the divided halves of consciousness are reconciled, but this resolution occurs off-stage; it is indicated by the poem’s words rather than embodied by them. John M. Fein describes

⁴⁸ Paz may have found this image in Valéry’s ‘Pequeños textos: Comentarios de grabados’: ‘Tarde ésta de la más hermosa estación, tan plena como una naranja cuya madurez se acentúa’ (p. 34).

this stanza as ‘una de las estrofas más bellas de la poesía de habla española del siglo XX’ (*Aproximaciones*, 169), but Jason Wilson describes the poem’s final line as ‘programmatic’ (*Poetics*, 29). Paz has made a new creed of his sensual answer to an Eliotic search for belief.

Paz described ‘Himno entre ruinas’ as his ‘primera y tímida tentativa’ (*Sombras*, 92) at the form of *simultaneísmo*, and Julio Ortega sees it as a new development in Paz’s work: ‘el texto equivale ahora a la conciencia: en esta analogía la fe poética y la ironía crítica son la nueva tensión interna del discurso poético’.⁴⁹ As I have demonstrated, however, Paz had already experimented with contrasting voices in the United States, and the debate between ‘fe poética’ and ‘ironía crítica’ is present in Paz’s earliest poems. Even the shift from the midday sun of the first stanza to the crepuscular world of Teotihuacán recalls the earlier contrast of a sunny Pellicer and a nocturnal Villaurrutia. The form responded to expressive needs that preceded it, and Paz confided in interview that he developed it ‘de un modo intuitivo’ (‘Genealogía’, 20). Since it did not arise from a conscious project, it came to answer a number of different purposes. Paz often talks of *simultaneísmo* as a way of bringing the past and present together, but the ruins and the mythical figure of *Polifemo* in ‘Himno’, which provide examples of the presentness of the past, could have appeared in a more straightforwardly descriptive poem that eschewed the dialogic form of Paz’s work. More commonly Paz uses the form, as here, in order to play off assertion against negation and to make the negotiation of influence an explicit part of the poem’s function. In ‘Himno entre ruinas’, a particular reading of Eliot which is extremely close to Paz is articulated in a way that Paz can then answer back. Paz attempts to exorcize an Eliot who, in the words of Manuel Ulacia, ‘vive las experiencias que presentan sus poemas a través de la religión y de la percepción intelectual’ (*Árbol*, 137). Yet, as I have suggested, since this Eliot was in part a projection of Paz’s own self, he was not so easily cast off, and the poem concludes paradoxically with a programmatic rejection of literary programme.

⁴⁹ *Arte de innovar* (México: UNAM/Ediciones del Equilibrista, 1994), p. 202.

Conclusion

'Himno entre ruinas' bears witness to a rite of passage in Paz's ambivalent relationship with T. S. Eliot's work. Paz calls on Eliot, as in his earliest poems, to express dismay at a contemporary world which lacks some form of serviceable belief – '*la proporción que rige al himno y al discurso...*' (LBP, 127). Yet the poem attempts to measure distance from this analysis and proposes a sensual apprehension of the world in the present moment – '*Los ojos ven, las manos tocan*' (LBP, 127) – as an alternative to '*proporción*' with its implication of an externally imposed order. 'Himno' does not resolve the debate which its form expresses so clearly. One can observe Paz arguing with both of its voices in *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950), which praises both the Mexican Revolution as a movement '*desnuda de doctrinas previas, ajenas o propias*' and the Catholic church of the colonial period which created '*un orden universal*' that '*justifica a esa sociedad y la redime de sus limitaciones*'.¹ *El laberinto* was produced in the years of Paz's closest involvement with André Breton and surrealism, a movement which fulfilled the same function that the left had done earlier for Paz. Its libertarian, utopian impulse answered both Eliot's '*nostalgia por el orden cristiano medieval*' ('TSE', 41) and his disturbing vision of meaninglessness, or vacancy, with a myth of future promise. Yet Paz continued to be fascinated by those aspects of Eliot that he attempted to mitigate with allegiances to the left and then the surrealists. The pattern is apparent in his earliest poems and continues beyond 'Himno entre ruinas' in later works such as *Blanco* (1967), '*Cuento de dos jardines*' (1968) and *Pasado en claro* (1975), where the influence of *Four Quartets* has come to replace *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*. It responds to a contradiction within Paz himself, and it is precisely Eliot's susceptibility to assimilation by different aspects of Paz's own temperament which makes the relation between the two writers productive.

Yet there is an aspect of Eliot's presence in 'Himno entre ruinas' and other poems by Paz which lies outside particular debates about belief or lack of belief. Paz began to publish his poems shortly after the appearance of 'El páramo' and 'Los

¹ *El laberinto de la soledad*, 4th edn, ed. by Enrico Mario Santi (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1998), pp. 294 & 244. Santi's notes indicate '*las más significativas desde el punto de vista conceptual*' of the changes made to the first edition of 1950 (p. 133).

hombres huecos' in *Contemporáneos*, and Eliot is a presiding figure in 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada' (1931) and 'Desde el principio' (1933). He continues to preside at the milestone of 'Himno entre ruinas' and at a later moment of full graduation when Paz recounts his poetic autobiography: *Pasado en claro*. The approach of my study is not equipped to speculate on this phenomenon, however, beyond the observation that it provides evidence of the consistent importance for Paz's work of his literary relationship with T. S. Eliot. The relationship between aspiring writer and presiding figure lies beyond the specific content and form of the poems and belongs to the realm of psychology, which a Bloomian rather than a reception approach is designed to analyse. As I argued in my introduction, I am sceptical whether Bloom's own version of the psychological approach to influence relations can account for the circumstances that obtain in Paz's reading of T. S. Eliot. Paz does not battle with Eliot in a one to one agon but involves a multitude of writers in their relationship – Ramón López Velarde, Salvador Novo, Paul Valéry, St.-John Perse, Xavier Villaurrutia, Martin Heidegger, Pablo Neruda, Francisco de Quevedo, and Luis Cernuda do not exhaust the list. In reconstructing these various influences I have aimed to account for the specific conditions in which the relationship between the two writers developed, and also to register some of the insight which lies behind Julia Kristeva's *intertextualité* – the insight that literary texts are comprised of other texts. Although I have laboured (with a historical concern that I do not find in Kristeva) to establish the textual environment from which Paz's reading and use of Eliot emerges, I have stopped short of her polemic against the authorial presence because I still regard Paz's negotiation of that environment as the result of particular choices and intentions and not the inevitable product of textual circumstance. Paz's repeatedly shifting exploitation of the 'potential for meaning' (Jauss, 30) in Eliot's work is distinct from that of the *Contemporáneos* and other Hispanic writers such as Pablo Neruda and Luis Cernuda.

'Meaning' is a problematic term, however, in the symbolist tradition to which, like the *Contemporáneos* and Paz in his later career, I have assigned Eliot. The syntactic experiment of Stéphane Mallarmé, which lies behind the formal fragmentation of *The Waste Land*, challenges the relationship of part to whole, experience to world-view, text to meaning. Yet, as I have noted, Paz consistently worries his reading to extract definable meaning. Whether in his broadly Marxist political allegiance of the 1930s, then his attachment to the utopian myth of surrealism in the 1940s and 50s, or the more relaxed veneration of the erotic in his later poems, he demands a counter to both the

horror of historical experience and a more insidious intimation of vacancy, or meaninglessness. Eliot was never (as if anyone could be) a pure member of the symbolist tradition, and he can accommodate Paz's combination of formal aptitude and impatience for a world-view. Paz would have been happy to read in 'Las fronteras de la crítica' that 'un crítico interesado exclusivamente en "literatura" tendría muy poco que decirnos, porque su literatura sería pura abstracción'.² Yet Paz's sense of the belief that informed Eliot's own poems could be troublesome. In a passage, which I have cited more than once, of his acceptance speech for the T. S. Eliot Prize, Paz describes his own adherence to 'las geometrías del futuro' and rejection of Eliot's 'nostalgia' for the medieval Catholic church. As I have noted in the case of *El laberinto de la soledad*, Paz's own writing operates on both sides of this debate, and he chooses later in the speech to draw back from the accusation:

Eliot creía en la fidelidad a la tradición y en la autoridad; otros creíamos en la subversión y el cambio. Hoy sabemos que la salud espiritual y política está en otras palabras, menos teñidas de ideas absolutas. En las palabras que fundaron a la Edad Moderna, tales como libertad, tolerancia, reconocimiento del otro y de los otros. En una palabra: democracia. ('TSE', 41)

Whether democracy convinces or not as a replacement for these philosophies, the significant act of this statement lies in its retreat from one set of vocabularies – the authoritarian and the rebellious – to words which are 'menos teñidas de ideas absolutas'. Paz does not describe words that are free of absolute ideas, in itself an absolute statement, but words which are *less* tainted. Yet the struggle between the third person of 'otros' and the first person of 'creíamos' suggests a hesitation, as if he is not sure of the precise distance he wishes to measure from his earlier position. There is perhaps still some attachment to the attitude expressed in *Corriente alterna* (1967):

Daría todas las especulaciones de los marxistas modernos sobre la dialéctica, el lenguaje, la estructura o la praxis entre los lacandones, por un análisis concreto de las relaciones sociales de producción en la Unión Soviética o en China. Pero la crítica de la tierra es imposible sin la crítica del cielo. (CA, 204)

The speech to the Ingersoll Foundation suggests that Paz is prepared to lay the criticism of heaven to one side, yet in *La otra voz* (1990) he declares of the political tradition that gave the modern world a vocabulary less tainted with absolute ideas:

² Translation of Eliot's 'The Frontiers of Criticism' by José Bianco, *Sur*, 251 (marzo-abril 1958), p. 16.

El liberalismo democrático es un modo civilizado de convivencia. Para mí es el mejor entre todos los que ha concebido la filosofía política. No obstante, deja sin respuesta a la mitad de las preguntas que los hombres nos hacemos: la fraternidad, la cuestión del origen y la del fin, la del sentido y el valor de la existencia. (OV, 64)

The vision that would replace the earlier debate between leftist and Conservative is found wanting, and Paz draws on *Four Quartets* for an insight of ‘nuestro mundo, que nosotros pensamos movido por el progreso, como la interminable caída del vacío en el vacío: *O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark...*’ (OV, 65).

Four Quartets was increasingly important in Paz’s later work. While in *La otra voz* it provides an example of the negative vision that he had earlier found in *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, he also discovers a compensation for that vision in the later poem. In a letter to Pere Gimferrer of 31 October 1988, a month after the award of the T. S. Eliot Prize, Paz describes a return to Eliot’s work:

En estos meses he releído a Eliot y he vuelto a comprobar que en su obra hay un tránsito – mejor dicho: momentos de fusión – entre la vida histórica y la vida espiritual íntima. En esto reside su paradójica modernidad y lo que, desde el principio, me atrajo en su poesía. Ya te he contado que lo leí por primera vez en 1930, cuando yo tenía 17 años; desde entonces me acompaña, me intriga, me irrita, me conmueve. Para Eliot lo único que de verdad cuenta y hace soportable el diario tedio y horror diario no está en el tiempo sucesivo, sea el de la historia o el del vivir cotidiano, sino en la intersección de los tiempos, en esos raros momentos en que, simultáneamente, somos tiempo y destiempo. Esos momentos en los que, como él dice, se juntan el ahora y el nunca (*never and always*). Son nuestra porción de paraíso. Éste fue también el tema de Proust, aunque sin más allá, sin trascendencia. Tal vez por esto, al cerrar su libro, nos preguntamos desconsolados: ¿por qué, para qué? (MyP, 330-31)

Paz returns to the historical poet of 1930, the poet of ‘El páramo’ and ‘Los hombres huecos’. He had attempted to mitigate this poet’s vision of ‘el diario tedio y horror diario’ with leftist and then surrealist assertion. Now, he employs Proust and Eliot’s own ‘moment in and out of time’ from the *Four Quartets* as a vision which ‘hace soportable’ the world of those earlier poems.³ Paz’s own poems embody

³ Although I have noted a consistent presence of *Four Quartets* in Paz’s later poems, his prose comments on Eliot’s poem tend to be unenthusiastic. In 1972, for example, he described the Eliot of the *Quartets* as ‘el que menos me interesa’ (PC, 23). The re-reading which he describes to Pere Gimferrer appears to have provoked a new admission of the importance of *Four Quartets* to him, however, and he surprised Charles Tomlinson in interview the following year:

la tentativa por *decir* esos momentos y revivirlos con palabras pero, al mismo tiempo, la conciencia de su fugacidad. Por esto comprendo a Eliot y lo admiro, aunque no comparto su fe en la salvación ni su terror ante la condena. En fin, la intersección de los tiempos – o la condena a los trabajos forzados del tiempo sucesivo – es el tema de los poetas verdaderos, en prosa y verso. (*MyP*, 331)

‘The intersection of the timeless with time’ is not only Eliot’s, and Proust’s theme, but ‘el tema de los poetas verdaderos’. Paz thus confirms his status as a major poet through his relationship with Eliot. Yet problems remain. Both Eliot’s and Paz’s versions of this vision resist precise definition. They both hover between a worldly secular experience and a sense of the beyond which they are reluctant to press. Paz worries, as he does in *La otra voz*, about where this leaves him. Proust’s conception of time does not go far enough, and Paz closes *À la recherche...* asking ‘¿por qué, para qué?’; yet he cannot share Eliot’s ‘fe en la salvación ni su terror ante la condena’.

He continues his discussion in a further letter to Gimferrer of 20 December 1988:

...la respuesta que da el narrador [de *À la recherche du temps perdu*] al enigma de su vida (la recuperación del tiempo pasado y, en cierto modo, su redención) tiene un carácter fatalmente personal: la redención del tiempo por la memoria creadora es obra de una conciencia aislada y se realiza a través de una obra de arte. Es una respuesta que atañe, sobre todo, al artista y a sus lectores. Eliot dice que el tiempo es “irredimible”; tal vez quiere decir que el objeto de la redención es el alma humana y no el tiempo. La redención que busca Eliot no es estética ni subjetiva: es una salvación religiosa que comprende a todos los hombres y a todos los tiempos. Su búsqueda es personal (la salvación de su alma), histórica (¿qué hacer con nuestro mundo?) y transhistórica (la redención del género humano). Como todos nosotros, Proust no puede decir nada sobre esta búsqueda. Como todos nosotros también – aunque con más genio que nosotros – Proust substituye a la revelación religiosa por la revelación poética. En cambio, Eliot rechaza la estética y la poesía (o las coloca en un segundo plano) en favor de lo único que de verdad le importa: la revelación religiosa. O sea: la salvación (o la pérdida) de todos los hombres. Por esto, aunque en “formato reducido”, por decirlo así, Eliot es un descendiente de Dante. Yo me quedo con la respuesta de Proust pero me doy cuenta de que es incompleta. En realidad no es una verdadera respuesta: es menos que una religión y más que una estética. Comprendo que Proust fue un talento mucho más amplio y poderoso que Eliot: fue el creador de un mundo imaginario mientras que el otro fue el autor de unos admirables poemas líricos y religiosos...

CT: ‘I take it that you feel Eliot’s development is rather disappointing after *The Waste Land*, that you go from that poem of many voices to that rather parsonorial single voice of the *Quartets*.’

OP: ‘Well, in some ways, but on the other hand I think also the *Four Quartets* – don’t you think? – is a work of great intensity and great perfection.’ ‘Octavio Paz Talks to Charles Tomlinson’, recorded at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, May 1989 (Keele University, 1989).

Las piezas teatrales de Eliot, sus comedias y sus dramas, están bien construidas, bien escritas y son inteligentes pero no nos conmueven. Sin embargo, fue un gran poeta lírico y religioso. Su obra es corta, pero variada – Eros es el gran ausente – y, no obstante, su delgada voz penetró en zonas espirituales que no rozó Proust. (*MyP*, 333-4)

These letters constitute Paz's last substantial discussion of Eliot's work, yet they bring no happy resolution of his relationship with the presence that 'me acompaña, me intriga, me irrita, me conmueve'. He remains divided over an attachment to Proust's secular vision, which he nevertheless concedes 'no es una verdadera respuesta: es menos que una religión y más que una estética'. Paz's work always pushed beyond aesthetics to some form of belief, yet stopped short of Eliot's religion. Confronted with what he describes as the inadequacy of his own, and Proust's, position, a hostility emerges and his response to Eliot cools: Proust is 'un talento mucho más amplio y poderoso' while Eliot's poems receive the lukewarm 'admirables', and his plays 'no nos conmueven'. Paz hurries, as if uncomfortable, through a less than enthusiastic assessment of Eliot's career, rushing the parenthetical judgment 'Eros es el gran ausente'. Yet the other side of this hasty assessment Eliot is once again not 'admirable' but 'un gran poeta lírico y religioso', and Paz concludes with an observation which leaves the previous debate to one side: 'su delgada voz penetró en zonas espirituales que no rozó Proust'. What are those 'zonas espirituales', and how do they relate to the belief in salvation and punishment that Paz has rejected? Paz does not pursue such questions, and so acknowledges an aspect of his response to Eliot which lies beyond the terms in which he has comprehended him.

One cannot be sure precisely what Paz meant by those 'zonas espirituales', but his reference to Eliot's 'delgada voz' does suggest the elegiac strain which is so persistent in Eliot's verse. A sense of unreality, of presences which are not quite present, pervades Eliot's poems, whether in the curiously rapt elegy for Phlebas as 'A current under sea / Picked his bones in whispers' (*CPP*, 71), or the conflation of loss and feared anticipation in 'Eyes I dare not meet in dreams / In death's dream kingdom / These do not appear' (*CPP*, 83), or the 'transitory blossom' of *Little Gidding*:

Now the hedgerow
Is blanched for an hour with transitory blossom
Of snow, a bloom more sudden
Than that of summer, neither budding nor fading,
Not in the scheme of generation. (*CPP*, 191)

Here is apparently a timeless moment, 'not in the scheme of generation'. Yet this snow which is 'neither budding nor fading' has appeared as a 'sudden' bloom, blanching the hedgerow for only 'an hour with transitory blossom'. The image of timelessness is itself fleeting. Paz may well have recalled this image when he produced the revised version of *Pasado en claro* which appears in his *Obra poética* (1990):

no han inventado el tiempo todavia,
no ha envejecido el sol,
esta nieve es idéntica a la yerba,
siempre y nunca es lo mismo (*OP*, 648)⁴

Paz illustrates a timeless moment where Eliot engages an apprehension of timelessness in a complex experience of shifting identities and seasons. In the first of his letters to Pere Gimferrer, Paz describes 'la tentativa por *decir* esos momentos y revivirlos con palabras pero, al mismo tiempo, la conciencia de su fugacidad'. Yet his tendency in *Pasado en claro* as elsewhere in his work is to conceptualize rather than to experience.

Eliot's acute sense of transience and the void that lies beyond finite experience has its formal counterpart in the symbolist isolation of textual fragments which float clear of interpreting comment: experience is separated from meaning. Paz was fascinated by both the form and the vision of absence, as his experiment with fragmentary form in the United States, then with the Mallarmé of *Un Coup de dés* in *Blanco*, and his repeated reference to Heidegger's *nada* attest. Yet he consistently mitigated this experience with compensating forms of utopian myth. His accusation of 'nostalgia' in Eliot itself politicizes an elegiac vision as a reactionary one. When he adopts Eliot's 'moment in and out of time' in his later poems it is as a form of philosophical explanation rather than as a vision based on a clearly delineated experience of the world. I do not wish to argue that Paz simply falls short of his precursor. What he loses in experience he gains in conceptual clarity: his 'instante', the present moment, dovetails neatly with what he describes as 'el fin de la idea del futuro' (*PC*, 99), the end of a belief in the future revolution which the left had promised. The epistemological content of later poems such as 'Paisaje', 'Felicidad en Herat' and 'Primero de enero', while it may have been instigated, to use Richard Sieburth's term,

⁴ The third line was originally 'esta nieve es idéntica a la otra', *Pasado en claro* (México: FCE, 1975), p. 20.

by the meditative passages of *Four Quartets*, is also quite distinctive as well as attractive. It is Paz's own characteristic achievement.

In this study I have proceeded from a narrative which records the circumstances of Paz's relationship with Eliot – what he read when, and in which translations – to a broader assessment of the extent and limits of the Eliot who appears in his own poems. I have attempted to measure Paz's Eliot against the Eliot of other writers whom he knew, such as the Contemporáneos and Pablo Neruda, rather than the Eliot of Anglo-American academic criticism, or of my own reading. Nevertheless, I have been unable to suppress a growing sense that I now find more in my reading of Eliot than in my reading of the poems by Paz which are closest to him. I have argued in this conclusion that Paz himself acknowledges in the 'zonas espirituales que no rozó Proust' that aspects of his own reading lie beyond his use of Eliot. Yet is there any purpose to such judgement?

Paz was an ambitious poet. The writers whose influence he courted – T. S. Eliot, Pablo Neruda, and Stéphane Mallarmé among so many others – represent a central European and more broadly Hispanic tradition of great writers. To have wrestled with these giants, Paz too must belong to their world. Yet to consign him to this tradition may be to consign him to the worst kind of neglect – pious admiration. When I interviewed the contemporary poet Homero Aridjis in Mexico City, he described Paz as a poet more admired than loved, a view which was repeated in conversations with other Mexican poets and readers. This lukewarm response is accompanied by a substantial professional critical industry which depends for its existence on Paz's reputation as a great writer. In this study I have encountered numerous casual and inaccurate observations of similarities between the work of Eliot and Paz made by professional critics. Paz's reputation gains temporarily from the association, but the lazy nature of these comments imply that he is not being read with the attention that he merits. His reputation as an essayist is then a further obstacle. Thanks in part to Eliot's example, one expects the great poet to be a man (or woman) of letters with a substantial body of essayistic prose which expresses his or her theories of poetry and life. Professional criticism welcomes this adjunct to the poems, since commentaries can be created easily by piecing together bits of the prose. Paz is a true heir of Eliot according to this model, and no doubt he was conscious of Eliot's example. Yet, as I have argued, the reliance of Paz's poems on the programmatic assertions of essayistic prose set him apart from the Eliot that Xavier Villaurrutia experienced in bodily terms as 'una fría y conocida fiebre' (*Epistolario*, 327-8). Sadly, I do not now believe that Paz's most rewarding poems are the ones that

operate closest to Eliot's influence. I find more satisfaction in the frequently anecdotal poems of *Ladera este* and *Árbol adentro* whose ambitions are more modest than in the set pieces of *Entre la piedra y la flor*, 'Conversación en un bar', or the later *Blanco*. They seem to me, at this end of my study, more aware of their limitations (both political and poetic) and more securely rooted in the experience that gives rise to them.

Appendix I: Surrealism

‘Himno entre ruinas’ was composed after Paz’s transfer to the Mexican embassy in Paris of December 1945. Although I traced the non-Eliot passages in Chapter Seven to Pellicer and Perse, influences that date from his earliest poems, a new presence is also apparent. When André Breton visited Mexico in 1938, he expressed his aim in a special edition of *Letras de México* that was dedicated to surrealism to ‘ver, oír, tocar’.¹ Paz did not meet Breton on that visit, but he would have read *Letras de México*, which published work by members of the Contemporáneos; and he had come across a translation of Breton’s *L’Amour Fou* in *Sur* in 1936 which ‘abrió las puertas de la poesía moderna’ (CA, 58). Paz had also established friendships with a number of the surrealists who sought exile in Mexico during the Second World War. It was one of this number, Benjamin Péret, who introduced Paz when he arrived in Paris to André Breton and the meetings at the Café de la Place Blanche. A substantial friendship developed between Paz and Breton, and Paz would later confess that ‘en muchas ocasiones escribo como si sostuviese un diálogo silencioso con Breton; réplica, respuesta, coincidencia, divergencia, homenaje, todo junto’ (CA, 58). Breton became internalized as a form of conscience, and so provided the moral guidance that had previously been taken care of by Paz’s political commitment.

Like Paz, Breton had turned from initial support of the orthodox left in *La Révolution surréaliste* and *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* to a rejection of socialist realism and an eventual public defiance of the communists in *Du temps que les surréalistes avaient raison* (July 1935).² Yet the surrealists preserved the aspirations of a libertarian movement beyond this split. They maintained the utopian impulse that informed the left while casting off the sophistry that Paz had encountered among Stalin’s apologists in the 1930s. They could thus fall into an allegiance with the presence of Pellicer and Perse in ‘Himno entre ruinas’ as representatives of a utopian desire that was innocent of the political left’s distortions. They were also innocent of the political right:

¹ ‘Los vasos comunicantes (fragmento)’, *Letras de México*, 27 (10 mayo 1938), p. 5.

² For details of the events leading up to this declaration see Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 296-97.

Eliot y Pound rechazaban con horror la sociedad moderna, pero buscaban el remedio en el pasado - en China o en Roma. El mismo horror ante el mundo moderno, la guerra y los valores burgueses, mueve a la vanguardia europea y latinoamericana. Sólo que ni los futuristas rusos ni los surrealistas ni los vanguardistas latinoamericanos buscan la respuesta en un modelo clásico. Sus arquetipos son la sociedad libertario-comunista o la sociedad primitiva: Fourier, Marx, Rousseau, Sade. Ninguno de estos nombres aparece en los escritos de los poetas angloamericanos, salvo como anatemas. (PC, 31)

Eliot gains some credit, as he does elsewhere, for his horrified rejection of 'la sociedad moderna'. Yet his resort to 'un modelo clásico' – 'la proporción que rige...' – appears to constrain the archetype of 'la sociedad libertario-comunista' which had attracted Paz from the start of his career.

Yet Paz did not perceive the relationship between Eliot and the surrealists solely in terms of a political opposition. Guillaume Apollinaire provided both a link and a further means of distinguishing between the two influences. Apollinaire, like Eliot, was heir to symbolist experiment with fragmentary form, yet he was also considered as a forerunner by the surrealists, and with his play, *Les Mamelles de Tirésias: drame surréaliste*, which was first performed in 1917, he unwittingly provided them with a name. The introduction that Ángel Flores attached to *La tierra baldía* made a link between Apollinaire and Eliot which Paz insisted upon repeatedly.³ He protests in *Los hijos del limo* (1974) that 'nadie ha explorado el [tema] de las semejanzas entre el collage poético de Pound y Eliot y la estructura "simultaneísta" de "Zone", "Le musicien de Saint-Merry" y otros poemas de Apollinaire' (*Hijos*, 166), a complaint that is repeated in his acceptance speech for the T. S. Eliot Prize ('TSE', 41), and *La otra voz* (1990) (*OV*, 48).⁴ The final chapter of *Los hijos del limo*, 'El ocaso de la vanguardia', is in part an attempt to insert the *simultaneísmo* of Eliot and Pound in the Parisian tradition of writers such as Apollinaire and Pierre Reverdy who shared a loose association with the surrealists.⁵

Nevertheless, he did make a distinction between the uses to which the two poets put this form:

³ Flores lists the modern 'fibras ancestrales que han tejido el egolirico de Eliot' as 'Baudelaire, Laforgue y Corbière, Apollinaire y Salmon' (p. 8).

⁴ For an account of Apollinaire's influence on Ezra Pound one can now consult Willard Bohn, *Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp. 27-41. Bohn suggests (pp. 39-40) that Pound's use of the term 'super-position' in 'Vorticism' (September 1914) derives from Apollinaire's 'Simultanisme-Librettisme' (June 1914).

⁵ Reverdy founded the magazine *Nord-Sud* in 1917 which acted as a focus for the first surrealists.

Cendrars y Apollinaire fueron los iniciadores: para ellos el *simultaneísmo* fue la forma lírica por excelencia de la poesía de la ciudad. Eliot y Pound transformaron este procedimiento y lo insertaron en una visión de la historia. (*Sombras*, 91)

Manuel Ulacia identifies a chief part of Apollinaire's attraction for Paz as 'aquel lirismo vital con el que celebra la realidad del mundo' (*Árbol*, 133). In 'Poesía e historia' Paz contrasts that lyricism with Eliot's vision of what he describes elsewhere in the same essay as 'el rumor confuso y aterrador de la historia humana' (*Sombras*, 67). It is an opposition which goes back to Paz's earliest poems, and a dialogue between the 'exaltación lírica' of Pellicer and Perse and the negating critical awareness of Eliot and Villaurrutia. The contrast gains new life with the surrealist injunction, which Paz describes as 'heredado de Apollinaire', to 'maravillar y maravillarse' ('Pasos', 55).

Although Breton and the surrealists provided an alternative for Paz to his earlier leftist response to the critical awareness of *The Waste Land*, they did not resolve his ambivalent relationship with the work of Eliot, as *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950) demonstrates. Paz cites Eliot directly in the later stages of the book:

Nuestra existencia particular se inserta en la historia y ésta se convierte, para emplear la expresión de Eliot, en "a pattern of timeless moments". (*LS*, 352)

However, it is not Eliot's explicit presence in the book which is significant so much as the implicit dialogue that Paz continues with the surrealists in his history of the Mexican colonial period and civil war.

Paz describes the history of Mexico as a mythical fall from grace:

La historia de México es la del hombre que busca su filiación, su origen [...] quiere volver a ser sol, volver al centro de la vida de donde un día - ¿en la Conquista o en la Independencia? - fue desprendido. (*LS*, 155)

He later described this sense of excision as 'más que un enigma un trauma histórico enterrado en las profundidades del pasado. La suspicacia, en vela perpetua, cuida que nadie descubra el cadáver y lo desentierre' (*It*, 17). The echo from the gruesome reference to Webster of 'The Burial of the Dead' indicates the joint involvement of Eliot and the surrealists in Paz's project. Anthony Stanton declares that the book's 'unconventional religious element is obviously derived from Surrealism's notorious anthropological and aesthetic interest in primitive societies as a source of regeneration

for the decadent West'.⁶ Yet he also notes that Paz had been reading Frazer's *Golden Bough* (p. 214). Frazer's work was the chief source for the 'mythic method' of *The Waste Land* which Eliot proposed in 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth' (1923) as a means of 'controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history' ('UOM', 483).

To a certain extent, Paz's anthropological approach represents a marriage of the two influences. His use of colloquial language as a register of popular experience, 'anticipated timidly' by Samuel Ramos according to Stanton in the book's chief Mexican precursor, *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934) ('Models', 226), has direct links to Eliot's 'La música de la poesía' and Paz's own poetic experiments of the United States. Yet Paz's discussion, in 'Los hijos de La Malinche', of 'un grupo de palabras prohibidas, secretas...' (*LS*, 211), suggests a surrealist unleashing of forbidden desires. In César Moro's anthology of surrealist poetry, published in Mexico in the late 1930s, Paul Éluard had referred to 'Algunas de las palabras que, hasta ahora, me estaban misteriosamente prohibidas'.⁷ Within this surrealist model, the native vigour of the Mexican people has been suppressed by the inappropriate forms of belief that have been imposed on them:

La presión de nuestra vitalidad, constreñida en formas que la traicionan, explica el carácter mortal, agresivo o suicida, de nuestras explosiones. Cuando estallamos, además, [...] rozamos el vértice vibrante de la vida. Y allí, en la altura del frenesí, sentimos el vértigo: la muerte nos atrae. (*LS*, 194)

Paz's critique of 'formas' that betray a native 'vitalidad' continues the argument of 'Himno' against 'la proporción que rige...', and also marks a distance from a version of 'mythic method' that would 'control' and 'order'.⁸ Paz's critique also represents a rejection of the forms of Marxist belief that had once attracted him. The value that he now attaches to the moments when his countrymen 'estallan', when they break through the forms that constrain them, reveals a surrealist allegiance. He praises the Mexican Revolution precisely because it was a popular explosion that did without the forms of belief, 'desnuda de doctrinas previas, ajenas o propias' (*LS*, 285):

⁶ 'Models of Discourse and Hermeneutics in Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad*', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 20, 2 (April 2001), p. 216.

⁷ 'La poesía surrealista', *Poesía* (suplemento), 3 (n.d. [1938?]), p. 8.

⁸ Eliot does not always conform to this role. *East Coker* declares that 'el conocimiento nos impone una forma y falsifica', trans. by José Rodríguez Feo, *Orígenes*, 3, 9 (primavera 1946), p. 23.

La Revolución es una súbita inmersión de México en su propio ser [...] es una búsqueda de nosotros mismos y un regreso a la madre. Y, por eso, también es una fiesta [...] como las fiestas populares, la Revolución es un exceso y un gasto, un llegar a los extremos, un estallido de alegría y desamparo [...] La Revolución apenas si tiene ideas. Es un estallido de la realidad: una revuelta y una comunión. (LS, 293-4)

Stanton observes that Paz's account of the Revolution is less history than a 'mythical and poetic view that idealizes one specific faction of the complex and contradictory movement: that of *Zapatismo*' ('Models', 230). Paz's rhetoric contains surrealist tropes of rupture and also of descent into the fluid territory of the unconscious, 'un estallido', but also 'una súbita inmersión' and 'un regreso a la madre'.

Paz's attack on the forms of belief does not name Eliot, but a contemporary essay, 'El lenguaje de López Velarde' (1950), indicates the position that Eliot occupied in relation to this rhetoric. Eliot provides a frame for Paz's reading of the Mexican poet whose "reducción de la vida sentimental a ecuaciones psicológicas" (*Peras*, 70) echoes the 'objective correlative' which provides a 'formula' for a 'particular emotion' (*SW*, 85). Yet Paz makes a distinction between the two poets' use of colloquial language:

El poeta [López Velarde] se sumerge en el habla provinciana - casi a tientas, con la certeza sonámbula de la doble vista - y extrae de ese fondo maternal expresiones entrañables, que luego elabora y hace estallar en el aire opaco. Con menos premeditación que Eliot - otro descendiente de Laforgue -, su language parte del habla común, esto es, de la conversación. (*Peras*, 72)

López Velarde acquires the rhetoric that Paz uses to describe the Mexican Revolution: he submerges himself in a 'fondo maternal' and then makes his language 'estallar'. Eliot, by contrast, is accused of 'premeditación'. 'La música de la poesía' is preoccupied with finding a structure for colloquial language – 'creo que las propiedades musicales que más deben interesar al poeta, son el sentido del ritmo y el sentido de la estructura' ('Música', 30) – which places him on the wrong side of Paz's surrealist polemic against 'formas'. While the surrealists adopt the old libertarian impulse of the left, Eliot represents calculation and restriction. In 'El surrealismo' (1954), a suppressive Eliotic theory of impersonality acts as foil for Paz's praise of the surrealist 'empresa poética',

which ‘no consiste tanto en suprimir la personalidad como en abrirla y convertirla en el punto de intersección de lo subjetivo y lo objetivo’ (*Peras*, 144).⁹

Although Paz praises the Revolution as ‘desnuda de doctrinas previas, ajenas o propias’, he continues by describing it as ‘una búsqueda a tientas de la doctrina universal que la justifique y la inserte en la historia de América y en la del mundo’ (*LS*, 285), that is, as a search for a form of belief. His attraction to forms of belief as in themselves positive, leads to what Stanton describes as ‘a surprisingly idealized vision of the Colonial world’ (‘Models’, 229). When *El laberinto* first appeared, José Vasconcelos noted approvingly that Paz ‘muestra singular cordura’ in his treatment of this period.¹⁰ In spite of his hostility to organized religion, Paz describes the Catholic Church of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as ‘una fe viva’ (*LS*, 242), and claims that ‘la creación de un orden universal, logro extraordinario de la Colonia, sí justifica a esa sociedad y la redime de sus limitaciones’ (*LS*, 244). He was clearly not happy to find himself maintaining this opinion, and in the second edition of 1959 he added a paragraph that pleaded, ‘No pretendo justificar a la sociedad colonial...’ (*LS*, 244).¹¹ The version of this chapter that appeared in the first edition had returned to the critique of belief that typifies the rest of the book - ‘Religión y tradición se nos han ofrecido siempre como formas muertas, inservibles, que mutilan o asfixian nuestra singularidad’ (*LS*, 247) – and asserted that ‘los mejores no han vacilado en desprenderse del cuerpo de la Iglesia y salir a la intemperie’ (*LS*, 249). Yet even so, the chapter concludes with an ambivalent assessment:

Mundo abierto a la participación y, por lo tanto, orden cultural vivo, sí, pero implacablemente cerrado a toda expresión personal, a toda aventura. (*LS*, 258)

The opposition between open and closed, the living and the repressive, which Paz was able to turn against Eliot in his essay on López Velarde, turns out to be less easily managed.

If Paz is unexpectedly sympathetic towards the colonial period in Mexico, he is equally surprisingly harsh to the liberalism that succeeded it: ‘La Reforma funda a México negando su pasado. Rechaza la tradición y busca justificarse en el futuro’ (*LS*,

⁹ Patrick O. Dudgeon encouraged this reading of Eliot by translating Eliot’s own translation of *damyata*, ‘control’ (*CPP*, 80), as ‘reprime’, ‘Los cuartetos de T. S. Eliot’, *Sur*, 146 (diciembre 1946), p. 25. Flores had chosen ‘controla’ (p. 47).

¹⁰ ‘Octavio Paz’, *Todo*, 6 abril 1950; repr. in *El Ángel* (supl. de *Reforma*), 24 marzo 1994, p. 15.

¹¹ ‘Un mundo suficiente, cerrado al exterior pero abierto al cielo’ was also changed to ‘...a lo ultraterreno’ in later editions in an effort to excise specifically Christian connotations (*LS*, 241).

270). It is a poor substitute, and he concludes sternly that ‘la geometría no substituye a los mitos’ (LS, 271). Yet in 1988 Paz described his first encounter with Eliot of 1930, and his own ‘ideas y creencias, las de entonces y las de ahora’, in the following terms:

No sentía nostalgia por el orden cristiano medieval ni veía en la vuelta a Roma una vía de salvación [...] Creía en una revolución universal que transformaría a la sociedad y cambiaría al hombre. Me seducían por igual las geometrías del futuro y los follajes del comienzo de la historia. (‘TSE’, 41)

El laberinto de la soledad certainly doesn’t preach a ‘vuelta a Roma’ but it does display a strong attraction towards a particular ‘orden cristiano’ and a corresponding hostility towards ‘las geometrías del futuro’. Stanton astutely observes that ‘there is a tension here [in *El laberinto*], and in all of Paz’s writings, between two utopias that pull in two different directions: the myth of an abstract future and the myth of a lost past’ (‘Models’, 231).¹² The specific manifestations of this tension in *El laberinto* suggest that the accusation of nostalgia that Paz levels at Eliot is a projection of an inner conflict which he wishes to settle in favour of the progressive, libertarian side of his thought. It is certainly doubtful as an objective assessment of Eliot.

Paz’s praise of the Colonial period as an ‘orden universal’ sounds broadly Eliotic, and it may well have been inspired by ‘What is a Classic?’, which appeared in separate Spanish translations in *Sur* in 1947 and then in Mexico in 1949. Eliot attempts to account for the distinction between ‘lo clásico universal’, found in Virgil, and a classic that is confined to its own language.¹³ He concludes that ‘lo que le da universalidad es la importancia de esa civilización y de ese idioma, tanto como el alcance de la mente del poeta individual’ (p. 21). Like Paz in *El laberinto*, Eliot relates the broader categories of civilization and language to the individual.

Eliot’s essay may also have provided evidence for Paz’s accusation of ‘nostalgia por el orden cristiano medieval’ and a ‘vuelta a Roma’. It concludes with admiration for ‘la universalidad del latín’, ‘un patrón establecido en Roma’ which comprehends both Virgil and the Christian civilization of Dante (p. 43). Yet it also stretches the terms of the debate in *El laberinto*. Eliot does not specify a specific belief qualification for the

¹² Paz recalled a conversation with William Carlos Williams from his stay in the United States of the 1940s in which he described an obsession with the past as a specifically Mexican characteristic: ‘A nosotros, le dije, nos asfixia la profusión de raíces y de pasados pero a ustedes les agobia el peso enorme del futuro que se desmorona’ (SyG, 124). Nevertheless, ‘nos asfixia la profusión’ invigorates the clichéd metaphor of ‘raíces’ to activate an Eliotic rather than Mexican association of sinister ‘roots that clutch...’ (CPP, 61).

¹³ ‘¿Qué es un clásico?’, trans. by E. L. Revol, *Sur*, 153-156 (julio-octubre 1947), p. 21.

classic, but decrees that ‘dentro de sus limitaciones formales, el clásico debe expresar el máximo posible en todo el orden del sentimiento que representa el carácter del pueblo que habla ese idioma’. Eliot’s inclusion of ‘el orden del sentimiento’ places a characteristic emphasis on the emotional expression of the individual which falls outside the range of Paz’s more schematic opposition between vitality and form. Eliot’s understanding of religion was as motivated by a personal awareness of suffering, and original sin, as it was directed towards an external belief. His preoccupation with Dante can therefore be read as evidence not only of a nostalgia for the order of the medieval Catholic church, but also as evidence of a fascination, and perhaps identification, with states of spiritual suffering. When Eliot did praise the ‘order’ of Dante’s work it was the ‘ordered scale of human emotions’ (*SW*, 142) which he admired, maintaining his focus on experience as well as doctrine. For Eliot, ‘understanding begins in the sensibility’.¹⁴ Paz tends to discuss belief in general terms as an issue in itself rather than relating it to the emotional experience of the individual, the ‘agony of the spiritual life’.¹⁵ Without this dimension, Paz’s discussion of belief, in *El laberinto* as elsewhere, expresses a contradiction which it is unable to explore. Since Eliot is a largely implicit presence in the book, Paz can afford to leave this contradiction to one side. However, in the pages of *El arco y la lira* (1956) that are dedicated explicitly to Eliot’s work, Paz’s reluctance to develop his arguments beyond a dialectical pattern of oppositions does limit the range of his observations.

I have argued that *El laberinto de la soledad* and ‘El lenguaje de Ramón López Velarde’ establish an opposition between a constraining Eliot and a vital surrealism. Yet I also noted at least a partial confluence of Eliot’s ‘mythic method’, inspired by Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, and a surrealist interest in myth as a project to ‘redonner à l’homme civilisé la force de ses instincts primitifs’.¹⁶ This confluence had appeared in ‘Sueño de Eva’, which was published in *Sur* in 1945 and later re-named ‘Virgen’.¹⁷ In interview, Paz connected the poem directly with Eliot and an oneirism which recalls the surrealists:

En este último [‘Virgen’] algunos críticos han advertido una influencia del surrealismo. Puede ser cierto por la aparición de imágenes oníricas; sin embargo,

¹⁴ ‘Introduction’ to *In Parenthesis* by David Jones (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. viii.

¹⁵ Eliot, ‘A Prediction in Regard to Three English Authors’, *Vanity Fair*, 21 (February 1924), p. 29.

¹⁶ Paul Éluard, ‘D. A. F. de Sade, écrivain fantastique et révolutionnaire’, *La Révolution surréaliste*, 8 (1 décembre 1926), p. 9.

¹⁷ In a letter to Pere Gimferrer, Paz describes the poem as ‘escrito hacia 1944, en los Estados Unidos’, 12 July 1988 (*MyP*, 326). I have discussed it here rather than in Chapter Seven because it raises issues about the relationship between Eliot and surrealism in Paz’s work.

lo esencial es el carácter mítico de esas imágenes, todas ellas en relación con un arquetipo femenino que es Diana pero asimismo Isis y la Virgen. Un arquetipo, por otra parte, muy moderno. La manera de asociar estas imágenes míticas podría recordar más bien a Eliot. ('Genealogía', 15)

Manguía had portrayed the mythical allusions of *The Waste Land* as an ironic strategy which revealed the emptiness of modern life, a reading that Paz carried into 'Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada'. Perhaps in the United States Paz had come across some of the Anglo-American literary criticism, such as Cleanth Brooks's *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939), which portrayed the 'mythic method' of Eliot as more than an ironic strategy. Certainly, in 'Sueño de Eva', he attempts a more enthusiastic exploration of myth. Eliot's presence dominates the poem:

Rocas y mar. El sol envejecido
quema las piedras que la mar amarga.
Cielo de piedra. Mar de piedra. Nadie.
Arrodillada cava las arenas,
cava la piedra con las uñas rotas.
"¿A que desenterrar del polvo estatuas?
La boca de los muertos está muerta."
Sobre la alfombra junta las figuras
de su rompecabezas infinito
y siempre falta una, sólo una,
y nadie sabe dónde está, secreta.
En la sala platican las visitas.
El viento gime en el jardín en sombra.
"Está enterrada al pie del árbol. ¿Quién?
La llave, la palabra, la sortija."
Pero es muy tarde ya, todo está oscuro,
se marchan las visitas y su madre
les dice: buenas noches, buenas noches...¹⁸

Paz employs the abrupt transitions of Eliot's earlier poems. The disembodied questioning in italics intrudes on the narrative as 'What are the roots that clutch...?' (CPP, 61) irrupts on 'The Burial of the Dead', and 'En la sala platican las visitas' echoes 'In the room the women come and go / talking of Michelangelo' of 'Prufrock' (CPP, 13). The passage concludes as the guests are bid goodnight, recalling the Albert and Lil and I dialogue at the end of 'A Game of Chess' - 'buenas noches, buenas noches'. The transitions create a sense of unreality which derives in Eliot's earlier poems from a subjective Idealism but which is compatible with a surrealist

¹⁸ *Sur*, 127 (mayo 1945), pp. 48-9.

oneirism. Paz also echoes one of the more bizarre images of 'The Burial of the Dead': 'Ahuyenta de allí al Perro que es amigo del hombre porque, si no, con sus uñas lo desenterrará de nuevo' (Munguía, 18). I argued in Chapter One that Munguía's prose translation accentuated the strangeness of the image. Paz now applies it to the poem's protagonist as 'Arrodillada cava las arenas, / cava la piedra con las uñas rotas'. Eliot's, and Webster's, dog threatens to dig up a corpse, and the horror that this provokes develops the highly ambivalent feelings towards the surfacing of subterranean life that pervade the poem's opening. Eliot fears what is buried. Paz's poem, by contrast, anticipates a form of release as the outcome of revelation - '*La llave, la palabra, la sortija.*'

Yet the poem's protagonist does not arrive at that moment of revelation: 'Al pie del árbol otra vez. No hay nada / y es inútil cavar' (p. 49). In the version of the poem that appeared four years later in *Libertad bajo palabra* (1949), Paz revised this passage, and drew on 'The Fire Sermon' and the 'testimony of summer nights' (*CPP*, 67) that remained after the nymphs had departed, to accentuate the sense of myth lost:

Al pie del árbol otra vez. No hay nada:
latas, botellas rotas, un cuchillo,
los restos de un domingo ya oxidado... (*LBP*, 115)

In spite of Paz's later description of archetypes in the poem, 'Sueño de Eva' appears sceptical about possible access either to myth or to the profounder levels of human psychology that are associated with it. While the poem's protagonist may recall images of other women from myths past, she fails in her attempt to uncover '*La llave, la palabra, la sortija*' which must represent just those levels of psychic existence that a 'mythic method' would hope to disinterr. The poem concludes with her locked outside a door that she has no means of opening: 'Busca la llave que se ha perdido, / la golpea, la araña, la golpea...' ('Sueño', 50). 'Sueño de Eva' attempts to bring Eliot and the surrealists together in a search for mythic meaning, but it concludes with the sceptical awareness of Paz's earliest Eliotic poems that this meaning cannot be found.

Eliot himself was generally indifferent towards surrealism, although he indulged in the occasional slight, as his description of the movement as 'a method of producing

works of art without imagination' attests.¹⁹ Nevertheless, William Skaff argues that Eliot shares a particular attitude to the unconscious with the surrealists: 'Both Eliot and the Surrealists believed that the unconscious is the source of an ultimate Reality, and both therefore were seeking unconscious experience in their art.'²⁰ Eliot certainly valued the capacity of poetry to 'make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate' (*UPUC*, 155). His own works are pervaded with a sense of the uncanny which is, in part, indebted to nineteenth-century writers such as Thomas Lovell Beddoes, Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, who are all cited by David Gascoyne as examples of a 'Surrealist element in English literature'.²¹ When asked in an interview of 1972 why surrealism had not had such a strong impact in English, Paz himself cited this proto-surrealist tradition:

Quizá porque los ingleses han tenido siempre su propia y especial versión del surrealismo. Hay una vena fantástica y humorística, para o pre surrealista, que aparece continuamente en los grandes autores, de Shakespeare a Dickens - para no hablar de Lewis Carroll y de Edward Lear. Un surrealismo *avant-la-lettre* y que puede condensarse en esta fórmula: el máximo de precisión para producir el máximo de desvarío. Es la cualidad que tanto amaba Baudelaire: lo *bizarro*. Es un elemento que está presente también en la literatura norteamericana [...] Esta mezcla de realismo y fantasía es constante en las literaturas de lengua inglesa y también en las germánicas. Es el elemento *romántico*, ausente en las lenguas latinas. Nuestras literaturas son hijas de la retórica y la elocuencia latinas. La Roma pagana inventó el derecho romano y la católica la escolástica. Nada menos romántico que esas invenciones. La literatura moderna es la reacción contra esas dos tradiciones. (*PC*, 27-8)²²

Paz finds this sense of the bizarre in Eliot, and uses his images and abrupt transitions in 'Sueño de Eva' to explore an oneiristic vision. Yet this surrealist Eliot needs qualification. Paz's dream world is relatively benign and turns on an image of buried revelation, or release, which is desired but denied. However, Eliot's image of buried material, which provides Paz's source, elicits more ambivalent feelings. In a brief discussion of Eliot and the proto-surrealist Beddoes, Christopher Ricks describes what

¹⁹ 'Introduction' to *Leisure the Basis of Culture* by Josef Pieper (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), p. 12.

²⁰ *The Philosophy of T. S. Eliot: from Skepticism to a Surrealist Poetic, 1909-1927* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), p. 133.

²¹ *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1st edn, 1935; London: Enitharmon Press, 2000), p. 94.

²² 'La música de la poesía' refers to Edward Lear's *Jumbles*, which it describes as 'un poema de aventuras, y de nostalgia por el romance de viajes y exploraciones remotas' ('Música', 23).

they share not as a liberating exploration of the unconscious but a 'sense of so much of life as a grotesque and sinister farce'.²³

Ronald Schuchard, in his essay 'The Horrific Moment', provides numerous examples of Eliot's terror of unreality and the life beyond consciousness: in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, for example, the characters 'seem merely to be spectres projected from the poet's inner world of nightmare, some horror beyond words' (*SE*, 190).²⁴ Eliot's sense of horror was particularly acute at the time he was composing *The Waste Land*, and in a letter to John Quinn of 1922 he confided that he found himself 'under the continuous strain of trying to suppress a vague but intensely acute horror and apprehension' (*L1*, 573). Eliot's notes to the poem reveal that the key in the door of 'What the Thunder Said', which Paz uses in 'Sueño de Eva' as an image of desired release – 'Busca la llave que se ha perdido' ('Sueño', 50) – has a more particular and sinister source in Dante's *Inferno*: Ugolino's description of the discovery that he was being sealed in the Tower of Hunger with his sons forever: 'and I heard below the door of the horrible tower nailed up'.²⁵ Freudian psychoanalysis, which provided the foundation of much surrealist thought, had 'not yet analysed', according to Eliot, 'the atmosphere of unknown terror and mystery in which our life is passed'.²⁶

'Sueño de Eva' sets a release, or revelation, against constriction in a neat opposition. For Schuchard, however, 'there is a close connection in Eliot's poetry between the rare moments of ecstasy and the recurring moments of horror' (p. 121). Of the vision that is recounted in 'Silence', Eliot declares, 'You may say what you will, / At such peace I am terrified' (*IMH*, 18), and in 'A Prediction in Regard to Three English Authors' he praises work that throbs 'with the agony of the spiritual life' (p. 29). The early drafts of *The Waste Land* also evince this association of vision with fear. In the original version of 'Death by Water' three women sang 'A song that charmed my senses, while I was / Frightened beyond fear, horrified past horror' (*WLF*, 59), and in 'Elegy', God's 'flames of ~~horror~~ [...] desire [...] / Approach me with consuming heat' (*WLF*, 117).

If religious vision and the motions of the unconscious aroused feelings of horror in Eliot, the song of the three women which frightened him beyond fear suggests that

²³ *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 142.

²⁴ See Schuchard, 125-8, for further examples.

²⁵ *Inferno*, trans. by John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 407.

²⁶ 'London Letter', *Dial*, 73, 3 (September 1922), p. 330.

the erotic life, which was revered by the surrealist movement, also bred anxiety.²⁷ Human love was not completely absent from Eliot's poems and, in the translation of 'East Coker' that appeared in *Orígenes* in 1946, Paz may have recognized the surrealist tendency to see erotic relations as a wider metaphor of union ('Si los hombres somos una metáfora del universo, la pareja es la metáfora por excelencia' [CA, 58]) in the vision of 'La asociación del hombre y la mujer / [...] Dos y dos, necesaria unión, / [...] Que representa concordancia'.²⁸ Yet Eliot did not venerate 'the ordinary desires of the flesh':

Whitman had the ordinary desires of the flesh; for him there was no chasm between the real and the ideal, such as opened before the horrified eyes of Baudelaire.²⁹

His dismissiveness perhaps betrays a note of defence, a counter-feeling of envy towards a poet like Whitman who could enjoy 'ordinary desires' since he was spared the awareness that horrified Baudelaire (and Eliot). Yet there is a genuine vision of human experience in Eliot's comments. The ideal to which Eliot refers is not, in this context, a divine ideal, but a product of human desire. The 'chasm', as he describes it elsewhere, is 'the awful separation between potential passion and any actualization possible in life'.³⁰ Rather than a conflict between a divine ideal and a worldly reality, he describes a conflict in this world between human desire and a reality which it will always exceed. Erotic relations, then, can only disappoint, as he explains in 'Baudelaire' (1930):

In much romantic poetry the sadness is due to the exploitation of the fact that no human relations are adequate to human desires, but also to the disbelief in any further object for human desires than that which, being human, fails to satisfy them. (SE, 428)

'Sadness' perhaps underestimates a vision that might more properly be described as tragic. Eliot himself was acutely aware of the pain that arises from the inadequacy of the world to human desire, an awareness that one cannot easily contradict. However, one

²⁷ T. S. Eliot: *A Study of his Writings by Several Hands*, which Paz read in this period, gives the impression that Eliot's literary critical readers were uncomfortable with the erotic life, from Cleanth Brooks's chilly 'the propagation of the race' (p. 29) to Duncan Jones's coy 'backward glance at carnal loveliness' (p. 38).

²⁸ Trans. by José Rodríguez Feo, *Orígenes*, 21-2.

²⁹ 'Whitman and Tennyson', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 40, 11 (18 December 1926), p. 426.

³⁰ 'Beyle and Balzac', *Athenaeum*, 4648 (30 May 1919), p. 393.

may hesitate to draw the same conclusion from this awareness as Eliot and his Baudelaire,

that the sexual act as evil is more dignified, less boring, than as the natural, 'life-giving', cheery automatism of the modern world. (*SE*, 429)

Eliot's rhetoric is not particularly helpful, although it is skillful polemic. The provocation of 'evil' qualified by the dandyish 'less boring' is particularly effective. He intensified this polemic with a quotation from T. E. Hulme at the end of his essay which asserted that man "is endowed with Original Sin" (*SE*, 430). Nevertheless, one does not have to view 'the sexual act', and erotic relations generally, as evil, in order to accept that desire is a source of pain. A truly comprehensive vision of the erotic must needs answer the thinking about desire that underpins Eliot's 'evil'.

In his obituary of André Breton, Paz declares that

su escándalo ante "la infame idea cristiana del pecado" es algo más que una repulsa de los valores tradicionales de Occidente: es una afirmación de la inocencia original del hombre. (*CA*, 52).

Paz describes him as the heir of Rousseau (*CA*, 53), the figure against whom much of Eliot's polemic on classicism and original sin was directed. Eliot's sense of 'the filthiness, that lies a little deeper' (*CPP*, 327) can seem like an unfortunate conclusion to draw from his vision of 'the awful separation between potential passion and any actualization possible in life', yet Breton's 'afirmación de la inocencia original del hombre', as Paz describes it, leaves much unsaid about the nature of human desire.

Eliot's vision of original sin was not restricted to his frequently gloomy view of erotic relations. The passage that he quotes in 'Baudelaire' from T. E. Hulme refers to "certain secondary results" of the doctrine which are largely political. The belief that "man is essentially bad" and that he can "only accomplish anything of value by discipline" (*SE*, 430) also has an artistic application. Eliot's praise of Valéry for maintaining that the composition of poetry is not 'mediumistic and irresponsible' attests to an original sin of poetic inspiration which is directly opposed to the surrealist promotion of automatic writing as the expression of the unconscious (*AOP*, xii). In order to make Eliot a surrealist, William Skaiff must elide the distinction that Eliot maintains between the original impulse and the subsequent 'conscious, arduous labour' (*AOP*, xii) that is required to produce a poem:

According to Eliot's esthetic theory, a poet seizes upon the unconscious material that periodically erupts into consciousness and fashions out of it a poem whose structure and content were already inherent in these subliminal feelings. (p. 152)

Skaff attempts to relate the whole production back to 'subliminal feelings'. He fails to acknowledge the artistic awareness that Eliot derives from writers such as Mallarmé and Valéry, and in fact his account of these writers shows little knowledge of Eliot's own comments on them: 'The French Symbolists sought a transcendent realm, separate from the phenomenal world, to which their symbols beckoned' (p. 202-3). Skaff dismisses them as idealist writers when, as I have argued, Eliot's praise of Valéry's 'consciousness of language' (*TCC*, 39) implies that he found in the symbolists less an idealism than a materialism of the word.

As a writer operating, often reluctantly, within a broadly romantic tradition, Eliot could not help but coincide on some points with the surrealists. Surrealist objects, for example, announced by Salvador Dalí in 1931, and described by David Gascoyne as '*objects functioning symbolically*' (p. 81) have a parallel in the objective correlative as a means of accounting for the way that the human subject projects meaning onto the world. Yet repeatedly for Eliot, words rather than objects either contain emotion - 'various feelings' inhere 'for the writer in particular words or phrases or images' (*SE*, 18) - or themselves behave like objects - 'their words have often a network of tentacular roots reaching down to the deepest terrors and desires' (*SE*, 155). Those 'tentacular roots' evince a feeling for the depths of the unconscious life, yet they equally communicate a feeling for the medium of language. Eliot clearly felt the need to police this tendency in his early essays, and criticized both Phillip Massinger (1920), whose 'feeling for language had outstripped his feelings for things' (*SW*, 108), and Swinburne (1920), in whose poems 'the object has ceased to exist, because the meaning is merely the hallucination of meaning, because language, uprooted, has adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment' (*SW*, 127). Yet in 'Modern Tendencies in Poetry' (1920) and its companion piece, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), he promoted the formal awareness that he found in the symbolists and which provided the foundation of his attack on personality: 'the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium' (*SW*, 46).

Surrealism, however, cannot be reduced entirely to automatic writing. The first *Manifeste du surréalisme* of 1924 conceded a role to the 'contrôle de notre raison' in

work that will ‘capter’ and then ‘soumettre’ the ‘étranges forces’ harboured in the depths of the spirit.³¹ Paz himself took little interest in automatic writing and maintained that ‘la poesía es el fruto de la colaboración, o del choque, entre la mitad oscura y la mitad lúcida del hombre’ (*PC*, 71). The Contemporáneos had provided Paz with a broadly symbolist training and he admired Villaurrutia, who ‘siempre tuvo presente la “vigilancia” de Paul Valéry mientras se abandonaba al fluir del inconsciente’ (*Vill*, 60). Paz’s own formal vigilance was confirmed in the 1960s by his reading of Mallarmé and the French structuralists and, under their guidance, he brings Breton into proximity with Eliot. He remarks on Breton’s ‘lectura apasionada de Mallarmé’ (*CA*, 56) and describes the combination of ‘profecía y esteticismo’ (*CA*, 56) in Breton’s own poems. He also describes Breton’s idea of poetry as impersonal, which echoes the Eliot of ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’.³²

El lenguaje es la marca, la señal – no de su caída [del hombre] sino de su esencial irresponsabilidad. Por la palabra podemos acceder al reino perdido y recobrar los antiguos poderes. Esos poderes no son nuestros. El inspirado, el hombre que de verdad habla, no dice nada que sea suyo: por su boca habla el lenguaje. (*CA*, 53)

Yet Paz subordinates this impersonal language to inspiration and a utopian belief in an original innocence of composition. As I have demonstrated, Eliot maintained a quite opposite view of unchecked inspiration. His concern for the ‘conscious, arduous labour’ involved in writing poetry implies a belief in an original sin of composition. Eliot’s understanding of language is also more socially bound, more resigned to an awareness that ‘Words strain [...] / Under the tension slip, slide, perish, / Decay with imprecision’ as society changes, and that the poet’s task is an ‘intolerable wrestle / with words and meanings’ (*CPP*, 175 & 179). In the 1930s Paz was attracted to this aspect of Eliot, which seemed to provide a diagnosis of contemporary society. Yet even in his earliest poems, Paz is reluctant to indulge too fully in what he describes as his ‘horror ante el mundo moderno’. He is torn between Eliot on the one hand and the sunnier visions of Carlos Pellicer and St.-John Perse on the other. As he separates from the orthodox Marxists in the 1940s he makes surrealism serve the function that had previously been taken care of by the left. In a lecture of 1954 delivered in Mexico, he described the search of the surrealists for

³¹ André Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 316.

³² Paz refers directly, if only in passing, to Eliot’s theory in ‘Pasos’, 52: ‘Eliot dijo que la poesía es impersonal...’

un nuevo sagrado extrareligioso, fundado en el triple eje de la libertad, el amor y la poesía. (*Peras*, 150).

Paz's account of the movement is rousing, yet it lacks definition. He does not contemplate the questions that Eliot raises about the status of human desire nor his lifelong objection to the promotion, attempted in the nineteenth century by Matthew Arnold, of 'poetry' as a value in itself: 'To ask of poetry that it give religious and philosophic satisfaction, while deprecating philosophy and dogmatic religion, is of course to embrace the shadow of a shade' (*UPUC*, 118).

Eliot's awareness of much human understanding as the shadow of a shade both attracted and disturbed Paz. If the Eliot of 'Himno entre ruinas' and *El laberinto de la soledad* was a repressive figure, he could also be an example of an equally threatening vacancy. One might expect the explicitly Christian subject of *Murder in the Cathedral* to have provoked Paz's hostility to the repressive Eliot. Yet when *Poesia en Voz Alta* performed the play in Mexico City in 1957,³³ the programme notes that Paz wrote for the production identified a consciousness of the void:

In this play [...] the true drama – as noted by Becket in one of the grandest moments of the piece – is not so much that of the martyr in front of his executioners, as that of the conscience alone with itself. The most powerful temptation is not that of pleasure, power, or glory, but the fascination that our own consciences exercise over us, the phantom image of our greedy ego. Or as Quevedo says:

³³ *Murder in the Cathedral* was not the first production of an Eliot play in Mexico. According to M. E. González Padilla 'The Cocktail Party, en inglés, fue llevado a escena por Salvador Novo en el teatro de Bellas Artes en 1947 [...] (Datos verbales de Novo)', *Poesía y teatro de T. S. Eliot*, 293. There was widespread Spanish American interest in T. S. Eliot's plays in this period. Between 1948 and 1960, reviews and translations appeared of *The Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party*, *The Confidential Clerk*, and *Murder in the Cathedral*, along with Eliot's essay 'Poetry and Drama'. In interview with Esther Seligson, Paz describes the aims of *Poesia en Voz Alta* in terms that echo Eliot. Their productions were 'adaptaciones del teatro clásico español bajo la forma del Music Hall', and he explains their aim thus: 'El idioma llevado a su expresión más alta vuelve a ser el idioma original, común y comunicable. El idioma en que todos pueden reconocerse y reconocer a los demás. Esta es, ha sido y será la intención primaria del teatro. De ahí su función liberadora y unificante', 'La hija de Rappaccini: entrevista con Octavio Paz', *La Cabra*, 3 (1 octubre 1978), pp. 10 & 11. In his obituary of Marie Lloyd (1923), Eliot had similarly described the music hall as a collaborative experience: 'The working man who went to the music-hall and saw Marie Lloyd and joined in the chorus was himself performing part of the act; he was engaged in that collaboration of the audience with the artist which is necessary in all art and most obviously in dramatic art' (*SE*, 458).

The abyss of waters
Where I fell in love with myself

Fascination with nothingness. Excessive pride is nihilism. Thomas knows that only he who forgets about himself can be saved, he who surrenders himself and transcends himself so that he can be transformed. From this point of view, Eliot's play (even though it has the external form of a tragedy) is a modern *auto sacramental*. That is: a play whose only character is the conscience with no other intermediaries than the void and grace.³⁴

Paz's description of the play's 'true drama' as that of 'the conscience alone with itself' provides an early example of the reading that in 'Poesía e historia' (1983) he applies to *Four Quartets*: 'la conciencia solitaria frente a la nada' (*Sombras*, 72). The two readings are more than coincidental since Eliot himself described the emergence of *Burnt Norton* from 'lines and fragments that were discarded in the course of the production of *Murder in the Cathedral*'.³⁵ I described Paz's reading of *Four Quartets* earlier as a secularizing of the poem and a strategy to bring it into dialogue with José Gorostiza's *Muerte sin fin*, Heidegger and Quevedo. Paz quotes the Quevedo here that had appeared in 'Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión' (1943), and a Heideggerian 'Nada', carefully distinguished from death, appears in the translation of Eliot's play by Jorge Hernández Campos, which Paz himself had revised.³⁶

...aquí sólo está
la cara blanca y lisa de la Muerte, silenciosa sierva
de Dios,
y tras la cara de la muerte el Juicio,
y tras el juicio la Nada, más horrida que las activas
formas del infierno;
el vacío, la ausencia, separación de Dios;
el horror del viaje sin esfuerzo a la tierra vacía
que no es tierra sino sólo vaciedad, ausencia, la Nada,
donde aquellos que fueron hombres ya no pueden
llevar el espíritu
a la distracción, al error, al escape en el sueño, a la
simulación;
donde el alma ya no se engaña, porque no hay
objetos, ni tonos,
ni colores, ni formas que distraigan, que desvíen

³⁴ Quoted in Roni Unger, *Poesía en Voz Alta in the theater of Mexico* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981), pp. 88-9.

³⁵ John Lehmann, 'T. S. Eliot Talks About Himself and the Drive to Create', *New York Times Book Review*, 29 November 1953, p. 5.

³⁶ See Unger, 83. It was Paz's only direct involvement in a translation of Eliot's work. The edition of *Asesinato en la catedral* that UNAM published in 1960 did not acknowledge his revisions.

el alma
 de la contemplación de sí misma, suciamente unida
 para siempre, nada con nada;
 no lo que llamamos muerte, sino lo que más allá de
 la muerte no es muerte
 es lo que tememos, lo que tememos. ¿Quién abogará
 entonces por mí?
 ¿Quién intercederá por mí en mi suprema necesidad?³⁷

The sense of Paz's unspecifiable presence in this passage is tantalizing. The Heideggerian 'Nada', which modifies as it translates Eliot's 'Void' (CPP, 272), certainly reads as Pazian, although it would have been the natural choice in Spanish for a metaphysical rather than a literal emptiness ('vacío' or 'hueco'). As with Paz's earliest poems, and in spite of his Christian theme, Eliot presents an image of the isolated consciousness bounded by nothing. Paz was never comfortable with an art founded on negation, yet he was still drawn to, even as he shied from, Eliot's 'Nada'.

Paz commonly employs a surrealist rhetoric to mitigate the bleakness of Eliot's vision. In '*Destiempos*, de Blanca Varela' (1959) he describes the movement's belief in the poem as a response to an Eliotic landscape, 'exorcismo, conjuros contra el desierto, conjuros contra el ruido, la nada, el bostezo, el klaxon, la bomba' (*Puertas*, 96); and in 'El surrealismo' (1954) a surrealist-inspired idea of poetry replaces the 'entre' of 'Los hombres huecos' with 'reconciliación': 'Asistiría el hombre a la reconciliación del pensamiento y la acción, el deseo y el fruto, la palabra y la cosa' (*Peras*, 145-6).³⁸ 'El surrealismo' was delivered as a lecture, and its language is clearly intended to rouse an audience. Such rhetoric is more exposed, however, in the private act of reading a poem. 'El cántaro roto' (1955) follows a similar pattern in which the bleakness of Eliot's vision is mitigated by injunction that derives from surrealism. The poem opens with a desert landscape that recalls *Entre la piedra y la flor*:

Pero a mi lado no había nadie.
 Sólo el llano: cactus, huizaches, piedras enormes que estallan
 bajo el sol.
 No cantaba el grillo,
 había un vago olor a cal y semillas quemadas,
 las calles del poblado eran arroyos secos
 y el aire se habría roto en mil pedazos si alguien hubiese gri-

³⁷ *Asesinato en la catedral*, trans. by Jorge Hernández Campos (México: UNAM, 1960), pp. 75-6.

³⁸ Breton had himself described the achievement of surrealism as 'el de haber logrado conciliar dialécticamente estos dos términos violentamente contradictorias para el hombre adulto: percepción, representación...', 'El surrealismo y la pintura', *Letras de México*, 27 (10 mayo 1938), p. 7.

tado: ¿quién vive?
Cerros pelados, volcán frío, piedra y jadeo bajo tanto esplendor,
sequía, sabor del polvo,
rumor de pies descalzos sobre el polvo, ¡y el pirú en medio del
llano como un surtidor petrificado! (OP, 255-56)

The passage concludes with an image which both suggests and denies the presence of water – ‘como un surtidor petrificado’ – just as ‘What the Thunder Said’ tantalizingly offers the sound of water – ‘Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop’ (CPP, 73) – but not its presence. I argued that in *Entre la piedra y la flor* Paz attempted to load meaning onto the external world which it could not carry. ‘El cántaro roto’ uses landscape to express a lack of human meaning. Paz seems more able to accept vacancy. Yet the poem concludes in a different mode:

Hay que dormir con los ojos abiertos, hay que soñar con las
manos,
soñemos sueños activos de río buscando su cauce, sueños de
sol soñando sus mundos,
hay que soñar en voz alta, hay que cantar hasta que el canto
eche raíces, tronco, ramas, pájaros, astros,
cantar hasta que el sueño engendre y brote del costado del
dormido la espiga roja de la resurrección... (OP, 258)

The invocation runs to over a page. As in the earlier *Entre la piedra y la flor*, Paz has turned a poem into a speech with designs on the reader. The content may have changed, and Carlos H. Magis argues that ‘a diferencia de la primera “poesía social”, el poema no se queda en la denuncia: además del testimonio persigue lo que puede “cambiar al hombre” y “cambiar la sociedad”’,³⁹ yet the hectoring is no less intense, even if Paz has substituted a surrealist demand to ‘soñar’ for the earlier leftist rhetoric.

Paz’s reading of surrealism conforms to a template established by his advocacy of the left in the 1930s and his extensive experience of political journalism, with its tendency towards pulpity. In ‘Poesía mexicana moderna’ (1954), he declared that for the poets who contributed to *Taller*, poetry was

una experiencia capaz de transformar al hombre, sí, pero también al mundo. Y, más concretamente, a la sociedad. El poema era un acto, por su naturaleza misma, revolucionario. (Peras, 57)

³⁹ *La poesía hermética de Octavio Paz* (México: El Colegio de México, 1978), p. 211.

Paz reads his own later experience of surrealism back into the magazine, but the real significance of his statement lies in the power that he is now prepared to give the poem and its language. In an interview of the same year, he declared that for the surrealists ‘la dualidad entre poesía e historia debe desaparecer, en provecho de la primera’.⁴⁰ If a poem has the power to resolve the conflicts of history then an injunction to ‘soñar hasta que el sueño engendre’ cannot be resisted as fantastical. By its very inclusion in a poem it gains the status of a revolutionary act. Saying makes it so.

Paz’s rhetoric changes from explicitly political to a more politico-prophetic register, but the impulse remains to mitigate states of vacancy with either accusation in the present or a promise of future plenitude. It is not solely a political impulse but also a wider need for meaning which recurs throughout Paz’s relationship with Eliot. ‘Máscaras del alba’ (1948) does not employ a surrealist rhetoric, yet it nevertheless vitiates the Eliot that Paz described in his programme notes for *Murder in the Cathedral*. Paz described the opening of his poem, and Eliot’s influence, in a letter to Pere Gimferrer:

Fue una tentativa, no lograda del todo, por encontrar un lenguaje moderno que pudiese expresar (y explorar) un mundo apenas tocado por la poesía de lengua española (e incluso por la francesa): la ciudad. Pero no la ciudad como un paisaje o un escenario por el que transcurre una anécdota sentimental o erótica, a la manera de Apollinaire, sino la ciudad como una condensación histórica y espiritual: piedras y gentes, signos y destinos: tiempo. Hay más de un eco de Eliot en mi poema [...] Los cinco versos de la primera estrofa me siguen pareciendo eficaces – comienzan como una descripción y terminan como una visión, a un tiempo histórica y espiritual, de nuestro tiempo:

*Sobre el tablero de la plaza
se demoran las últimas estrellas.
Torres de luz y alfiles afilados
cercan las monarquías espectrales.
¡Vano ajedrez, ayer combate de ángeles!*

[...] Técnica de la *presentación*, para emplear la expresión de Pound, sin enlaces ni comentarios. (12 July 1988, *MyP*, 325-6)

Although Paz describes a ‘técnica de la presentación [...] sin enlaces ni comentarios’, this opening stanza is impatient to comment. The descriptive first four lines ‘terminan

⁴⁰ Roberto Vernengo, ‘Entrevista con Octavio Paz’, *Sur*, 227 (marzo-abril 1954), p. 62. Paz makes a similar assertion in ‘Introducción a la historia de la poesía mexicana’ (1950): ‘Cada poema es una tentativa por resolver la oposición entre historia y poesía, en beneficio de la segunda’ (*Peras*, 30).

en una visión': '¡Vano ajedrez, ayer combate de ángeles!' In interview, Paz elaborated on the content of this vision: 'En ese juego vano se ha resuelto el antiguo combate entre los diablos y los ángeles que fue la visión medieval de la historia' ('Genealogía', 20). Paz may have been inspired by the Cleanth Brooks essay in *T. S. Eliot: A Study of his Writings by Several Hands* (1947), which he quotes directly in *El arco y la lira* (Arco1, 76). Brooks cites Allen Tate on the game of chess in *The Waste Land* as "a game that symbolizes the inhuman abstraction of the modern mind".⁴¹ Certainly, Paz's 'vano ajedrez', which calls up a history of spiritual decline, responds to this idea of Eliot. It is an Eliot that he rejected in 'Himno entre ruinas', yet one which reveals his own reluctance to contemplate vacancy within the poem.

'El cántaro roto' and 'Máscaras del alba' were both included in *La estación violenta* (1958), a collection that began with 'Himno entre ruinas' and ended with *Piedra de sol* (1957). Eliot's presence is detectable, if indistinctly, in a literally pivotal point of *Piedra de sol*. Halfway through the poem Paz turns to an air-raid in the Spanish Civil War:

Madrid, 1937,
 en la Plaza del Ángel las mujeres
 cosían y cantaban con sus hijos,
 después sonó la alarma y hubo gritos,
 casas arrodilladas en el polvo,
 torres hendidas, frentes escupidas
 y el huracán de los motores, fijo:
 los dos se desnudaron y se amaron
 por defender nuestra porción eterna,
 nuestra ración de tiempo y paraíso,
 tocar nuestra raíz y recobrarnos,
 recobrar nuestra herencia arrebatada
 por ladrones de vida hace mil siglos,
 los dos se desnudaron y besaron
 porque las desnudeces enlazadas
 saltan al tiempo y son invulnerables. (OP, 268-9)

There are no obvious echoes of Eliot here, although the air-raid could perhaps be related to *Little Gidding*.⁴² However, Magis describes the scene as an example of 'los recuerdos

⁴¹ Rajan, ed., 15.

⁴² As Pablo Zambrano points out, a number of analogies can also be drawn between other parts of *Piedra de sol* and *Four Quartets*: the circular form of Paz's poem embodies 'in my beginning is my end' of *East Coker* (CPP, 177); the 'unión de los contrarios' of Eliot's Heraclitean epigraph emerge in Paz's 'vida y muerte / pactan en ti, señora de la noche' (OP, 276); and 'If all time is eternally present / All time is unredeemable' (CPP, 171) in *Burnt Norton* invites comparison to 'no pasa nada, sólo un parpadeo / del

de hechos muy concretos, que parecen interrumpir el discurso' (Magis, 209-10). History has invaded the poem as it invaded the world of symbolism in *The Waste Land*. Paz may also have wished to answer the typist scene of Eliot's poem, and as Pere Gimferrer points out, it is the first time that 'se emplea [...] en el texto la tercera persona del plural [...] para describir un hecho'.⁴³ Paz, like Tiresias, is an onlooker. Eliot is the figure against whom Paz outlines a double argument for a surrealist view of the erotic: the argument is both a rebuttal of frigidity in *The Waste Land* and also an answer to the vision of history as destruction that he finds in Eliot's poem. Yet, as elsewhere in *La estación violenta*, the form that Paz adopts for this rebuttal coerces the reader. The parallelism of 'defender', 'tocar', 'recobrar' and the repetition of 'nuestra' directs the reader to accept a particular interpretation of the event – that love conquers bombs – which is forced. When he returns to the couple themselves, the assonance of e's and a's in 'desnudeces enlazadas' entwines the reader pleasingly in their act, but the following line launches again into the interpretation of their experience. The reverse of the generally iambic rhythm in 'saltan' is effective, and generates appropriate relief as the rhythm settles back to type in 'y son invulnerables'. Yet the metric has been made to serve a particular understanding of the scene rather than to realize it, and one cannot be sure that Paz himself is convinced. 'Ladrones de vida' recalls the impotent anger of *Entre la piedra y la flor*, a poem with which he was never satisfied.

Piedra de sol appears to answer a particular idea of Eliot's historical vision, yet when Roberto González Echevarría invited Paz in 1972 to expand on the connections between *Piedra de sol* and *The Waste Land*, he received a surprisingly curt response:

Yo no veo ninguna relación. La forma es distinta, el vocabulario es distinto, las imágenes, el ritmo, la visión del mundo, todo es distinto. *Piedra de sol* es un poema lineal que sin cesar vuelve sobre sí mismo, es un círculo o más bien una espiral. *The Waste Land* es mucho más complejo. Se ha dicho que es un *collage*, pero yo diría que es un *assemblage de pièces détachées*. Una extraordinaria máquina verbal que emite significados poéticos por la rotación y el frotamiento de una parte con otra y de todas con el lector. No, yo prefiero *The Waste Land* a *Piedra de sol*, francamente. Si hay que comparar algo mío con *The Waste Land* – pero yo no veo ni la razón ni la necesidad de la comparación – me parece que

sol, un movimiento apenas, nada, / no hay redención, no vuelve atrás el tiempo' (OP, 275), 'Paz, Borges, Eliot: tres recreaciones del eterno retorno', in *Las formas del mito en las literaturas hispánicas del siglo XX* (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 1994), pp. 187, 196-7 & 199. Zambrano cautiously describes these examples as 'imágenes, ideas, versos, etc. cuya similitud puede ser solo coincidencia pero que hay que señalar' (p. 199).

⁴³ *Lecturas de Octavio Paz* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 1980), p. 48.

habría que pensar en *Homenaje y profanaciones*, *Salamandra*, *Viento entero* o *Blanco*. (PC, 21)

Paz's description in 1974 of *The Waste Land* as a 'máquina verbal que emite significados' responds to his reading in the 1960s of Stephane Mallarmé and the French structuralists. He displays an epistemological awareness that was already present in his modification of Neruda in the 1930s, but which could be attenuated by a temptation towards manifesto statements that were inspired by the left and then his interpretation of surrealism. Paz's reading of surrealism, which conflates the writing of the poem with revolutionary action, leads to even bolder expressions of the utopian impulse than his works of the 1930s. In the later reading of *The Waste Land* as a 'máquina verbal', however, Paz's attention is directed at the mechanics by which meaning is constructed rather than at any particular meaning which is favoured for its promise of utopian transformation. One would expect this epistemological turn to draw Paz into an acceptance of Eliot's negative vision and the fragmentary form of *The Waste Land*, itself derived from the symbolist line of Mallarmé, which expresses that vision. In the final appendix, I will ask how *Blanco* (1967) meets that expectation, and will propose 'Cuento de dos jardines' (1968) and *Pasado en claro* (1975) as examples of an alternative use of his precursor which looks to *Four Quartets* rather than *The Waste Land*. First, however, I wish to analyse Paz's first extensive prose discussion of T. S. Eliot, which appears in *El arco y la lira* (1956).

Appendix II: Eliot in *El arco y la lira*

El arco y la lira (1956) is Paz's first substantial work of poetic theory, and it also includes his first extensive discussion of T. S. Eliot.¹ He proposes at the outset to 'interrogar a los testimonios directos de la experiencia poética' (*ArcoI*, 14), an approach which, as Anthony Stanton points out, is indebted to the phenomenology of Husserl.² Paz does not confine himself to a work of philosophical definition, however. He soon embarks on a mythical vision of a past age when 'se creía que el signo y el objeto representado eran lo mismo' (*ArcoI*, 29). Unity was followed by division, however: 'al cabo de los siglos los hombres advirtieron que entre las cosas y sus nombres se abría un abismo' (*ArcoI*, 29). The poetic experience, then, is promoted from an object of analysis to the means of healing various forms of division. It must 'fundar [...] un nuevo sagrado' (*ArcoI*, 24):

La poesía contemporánea se mueve entre dos polos: por una parte, es una profunda afirmación de los valores mágicos; por la otra una vocación revolucionaria. (*ArcoI*, 305)

The sacred, the magical and the revolutionary all bear the imprint of the surrealist movement, and André Breton wrote Paz when the book appeared in French in 1965 to express his enthusiasm.³ Surrealism is a dominant influence which is modified and complemented by a number of other influences. Enrico Mario Santí argues, for example, that

en efecto, en *El arco y la lira* Paz mantiene las jerarquías conceptuales del surrealismo bretoniano pero sustituye la revelación psíquica por la revelación ontológica: no le interesa revelar al inconsciente sino al ser.⁴

Paz rejects Breton's equation of inspiration with the 'dictado del inconsciente' (*ArcoI*, 170), and instead declares that 'la inspiración es una manifestación de la "otredad"

¹ Parts of it were recycled in English as an inaugural speech at a seminar on T. S. Eliot, the papers of which were collected in *T. S. Eliot*, ed. by M. M. Bhalla (Bombay: P. C. Manaktala & Sons, 1965).

² 'Una lectura de *El arco y la lira*', in *Reflexiones lingüísticas y literarias*, ed. by Rafael Olea Franco and James Valender, 2 (México: El Colegio de México, 1992), p. 304.

³ I owe this information to an interview with Anthony Stanton in Mexico City, 16 April 2002. Paz later lost the letter.

⁴ 'Textos y contextos: Heidegger, Paz y la poética', *Iberoromania*, 15 (1982), p. 90.

constitutiva del hombre' (*ArcoI*, 175). Paz takes the concept of 'otredad' from Antonio Machado, but the broadly ontological approach that Santí identifies also derives from Heidegger. According to Anthony Stanton ('Lectura', 310-11), Paz was attracted by the preoccupation with lyric poetry of Heidegger's later works and, in line with the German philosopher's description of language in 'Art and Poetry' as 'the house of being', he declares that 'la poesía es entrar en el ser' (*ArcoI*, 108). However, although Paz modifies Breton's Freudian model of the unconscious with a philosophy of being, his use of Heidegger generally dovetails with his surrealist allegiance. He proposes the 'angustia', for example, of '¿Qué es la metafísica?' as the route not to 'nothing' but to a 'condición original' with marked surrealist overtones:

La angustia y el miedo son las dos vías, enemigas y paralelas, que nos abren y cierran, respectivamente, el acceso a nuestra condición original. (*ArcoI*, 139)

Stanton argues that Heidegger offered 'una teología negativa, una religiosidad secular', which was complemented by Rudolf Otto's *Lo santo: lo racional y lo irracional en la idea de Dios*, published in *La Revista de Occidente* in 1928 ('Lectura', 312). Otto attempted to account for "lo numinoso" – 'el elemento *irracional* de la experiencia [religiosa], anterior a su racionalización teológica o su codificación intelectual y moral' ('Lectura', 312) – and so provided a further support to the surrealist search for 'un nuevo sagrado extrareligioso' (*Peras*, 150).

Paz's earlier Marxist allegiance had tended to subordinate artistic products to historical process. Surrealism, via Heidegger, now offered a utopian myth of access through poetry to a 'condición original' which could answer the 'horror ante el mundo moderno' that Paz shared with Eliot. However, in order to facilitate that myth Paz had to revise his conception of the relationship between poem and history. Influenced, according to Stanton, by Heidegger's 'The Origin of the Work of Art' – "el arte es historia en el sentido esencial que la funda" ('Lectura', 311) – Paz now argues:

Como toda creación humana, el poema es un producto histórico, hijo de un tiempo y un lugar; pero también es algo que trasciende lo histórico y se sitúa en un tiempo anterior a toda historia, pero no fuera de ella. Antes, por ser realidad arquetípica, imposible de fechar, comienzo absoluto, tiempo total y autosuficiente, dentro de la historia – y más: historia – porque sólo vive encarnado, re-engendrándose, repitiéndose en el instante de la comunión poética. Sin la historia – sin los hombres, que son el origen, la substancia y el fin de la historia – el poema no podría nacer ni encarnar; y sin el poema tampoco habría historia, porque no habría origen ni comienzo. (*ArcoI*, 183-4)

Eliot's 'moment in and out of time' may also have been a source for this understanding of the poem as 'un product histórico' at the same time as 'trasciende lo histórico'. Paz's appeal to a pre-historical time, however, 'un tiempo anterior a toda historia', and a 'comienzo absoluto' which can be repeated in 'el instante de la comunión poética' clearly attempts to promote his surrealist-inspired belief in a myth of original innocence.

Paz's argument that poetry is the repository of a 'tiempo total y autosuficiente' is itself debatable, and it is complicated further by his use of the term 'ritmo' to describe this myth. One is accustomed to equate 'ritmo' with metre, a formal description of the manner in which language unfolds over time, yet Paz has greater ambition for it:

Sentimos que el ritmo es un ir hacia algo [...] el tiempo posee una dirección, un sentido, porque es nosotros mismos [...] el ritmo no es medida sino tiempo original. (*Arco1*, 57)

'Ritmo' is 'tiempo original' and 'todo poema, en la medida en que es ritmo, es mito' (*Arco1*, 65). But if 'ritmo no es medida' how does Paz measure that 'en la medida que es ritmo'? The question is crucial, since Paz makes the measure of a poem's rhythm the qualification for its mythical efficacy. Presumably, he doesn't wish to argue that all verse is inherently mythical by virtue of its rhythm. Or does he?

Versificación rítmica y pensamiento analógico son las dos caras de una misma medalla. Gracias al ritmo percibimos esta universal correspondencia; mejor dicho, esas correspondencias no son sino manifestaciones del ritmo. (*Arco1*, 73)

Paz's equation of 'versificación rítmica' with 'pensamiento analógico' indicates that, in spite of the assertion that 'el ritmo no es medida', he makes no real distinction between the formal and the mythical properties of rhythm. Formal properties, which are in themselves neutral, then acquire a strong moral coloration as they promote or hinder his conception of myth. A reader could be forgiven for concluding from the passage cited above that all verse does indeed possess mythical properties which are denied prose. Paz has allowed a moralizing dialectical habit of thought – mythical 'versificación rítmica' versus unmythical prose – to lead him into extravagant assertions about formal properties. In the second edition of the book, he made some attempt to clear a distinction between the formal 'verso' and the analogical 'ritmo', changing 'el ritmo español' (*Arco1*, 79) to 'el verso español', for example, yet the tendency to elide the two

remains.⁵ Eliot himself made a similar assertion in his definition of the ‘auditory imagination’ as

the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. (*UPUC*, 118-19)

His ‘returning to the origin’ corresponds to Paz’s ‘tiempo original’, yet Eliot’s claim is less strident. It is the ‘feeling for syllable and rhythm’ which communicates with the unconscious, not the rhythm itself, and the product of that feeling is tentatively described – ‘bringing something back’. Eliot might be accused of vagueness here, but he could also be credited with a tactful refusal to burden a formal property with an excessive freight of meaning.

Paz’s discussion of ‘ritmo’ occurs in the same section – ‘Verso y prosa’ – as his discussion of Eliot, which is consequently troubled by the same loaded treatment of poetic form:

La poesía inglesa tiende a ser puro ritmo: danza, canción, verso blanco. La francesa, discurso, monólogo, “meditación poética”. (*ArcoI*, 74)

The qualifier ‘puro’ implies a ‘ritmo’ that is distinct from the merely formal definition, and so activates the mythical association that he has established earlier. Yet this contrast between English and French verse would assign Eliot and the surrealists to unaccustomed sides of the Pazian contrast between myth and critical consciousness. Paz finds a way through this problem by making Eliot, and Milton, represent, ‘la influencia latina dentro de la poesía inglesa’:

Reacciones de signo contrario, períodos durante los cuales el pensamiento, la ironía, la lengua colloquial o la versificación silábica equilibran la balanza. (*ArcoI*, 74)

Eliot can now represent, as he has done before in Paz’s work, an ironical consciousness in contrast to the mythical awareness of ‘ritmo’. Yet in order to maintain the dual formal and mythical status of ‘ritmo’ Paz must also accuse Eliot, incorrectly, of deserting

⁵ *El arco y la lira*, 2nd edn (México: FCE, 1967), p. 87. For a summary and interpretation of the changes that Paz made to the second edition see Emir Rodríguez Monegal, ‘Relectura de *El arco y la lira*’, *Revista Iberoamericana*, 37, 74 (enero-marzo 1971), 35-46.

accentual metre for syllabic versification. The assertion arises from the contrast that he has established *a priori* rather than from observation, as does the curious implication that ‘la lengua coloquial’ in English derives from ‘la influencia latina’.

As he proceeds, the already shifting contrast on which his discussion is based, between the accentual and the syllabic, the mythical and the reflective, mutates further. He appears to continue the formal argument:

The Waste Land [...] ha sido juzgado como un poema revolucionario por buena parte de la crítica inglesa y extranjera. Pero sólo a la luz de la tradición del verso inglés puede entenderse cabalmente la significación de este poema. (*Arco1*, 74)

Yet the appearance of ‘revolucionario’ suggests a further transposition to a political realm and, indeed, Eliot’s poem

no es simplemente la descripción del helado mundo moderno, sino la nostalgia de un orden universal cuyo modelo es el orden cristiano de Roma. (*Arco1*, 74)

Eliot’s Latinity is not formal after all, but an adherence to a body of religious beliefs. The active contrast is no longer formal or mythical but political – between ‘revolucionario’ and ‘nostalgia’. Paz has changed the personnel but the emotive pattern of his argument is maintained – he still pursues a contrast between a characteristic with a broadly positive value and its negative counterpart. Moral scheme preempts observation.

‘Nocturno de la ciudad abandonada’ used Eliot as the model for a poem about the loss of past beliefs. The early Paz’s Eliot was consistent with a Marxist reading of modern history as the destroyer of much that had made poetry possible in previous cultures. *El arco y la lira* aims to revise the Marxist version of history with a belief in the efficacy of poems and ‘ritmo’ to incarnate a foundational mythical time. Eliot’s seeming denial of poetry’s ability to effectively incarnate such myth could no longer, therefore, receive a Marxist sanction from Paz:

Lo que hace a Baudelaire un poeta moderno no es tanto la ruptura con el orden cristiano, cuanto la conciencia de esa ruptura. Modernidad es conciencia. Y conciencia ambigua: negación y nostalgia.⁶ El lenguaje de Eliot recoge esta doble herencia: despojos de palabras, fragmentos de verdades, el esplendor del Renacimiento inglés aliado a la miseria y aridez de la urbe moderna. Ritmos rotos, mundo de asfalto y ratas atravesado por relámpagos de belleza caída. En este reino

⁶ Paz added ‘prosa y lirismo’ to this sentence in *Arco2*, 77.

de hombres huecos, todo carece de sentido. Al ritmo sucede la repetición. (*Arco1*, 75)

Eliot offers 'ritmos rotos' and 'repetición'. He has fallen behind Paz's ambition for poetry. Yet at the same time both Eliot and Baudelaire are accused of 'nostalgia'. Paz criticizes Eliot for denying 'ritmo' and at the same time his sense of Eliot's Christian beliefs hardens. His reading of Eliot may well have been influenced by Cleanth Brooks, whose description of Eliot's theme as 'la rehabilitación de un sistema de creencias conocido pero desacreditado' Paz quotes (*Arco1*, 76).⁷ Eliot's 'reforma poética es sobre todo una restauración', Paz concludes (*Arco1*, 76). Yet Eliot seems to be receiving criticism for both denying and for having beliefs.

Paz never distinguishes clearly between the value of his 'ritmo' or 'comienzo' and the deficiencies of Eliot's own beliefs. In fact, the rhetoric that Paz employs to describe Eliot veers towards terms that he values. He opens a contrast between Pound as a poet of the future and Eliot as the nostalgic conservative who looks to the past - 'Eliot desea efectivamente regresar y reinstalar a Cristo; Pound se sirve del pasado como otra forma del futuro' (*Arco1*, 76).⁸ Eliot engages in 'la búsqueda de una pauta que dé sentido a la historia, fijeza al movimiento' (*Arco1*, 77), but then Paz reframes this search as 'una tentativa por regresar al centro del que un día fuimos expulsados'. Eliot is no longer an apologist for the power of Rome; like Paz and the surrealists, he attempts to recover the myth of an original innocence. In the second edition of *El arco*, Paz changed this last sentence to 'una búsqueda de la casa ancestral' (*Arco2*, 80), thus confining Eliot more tightly to a socially determinate religious project rather than a more broadly mythical one.⁹

The contradictions in Paz's attitude to Eliot arise in part from the polemical use to which he put him in his early career. Paz's work of the 1930s brings Eliot into a debate with the *artepurismo* of the Contemporáneos and so favours him as a poet of belief, of any belief, notwithstanding the negative role that Eliot often plays in Paz's poems of the period. As Paz adopts the beliefs of the surrealists, however, he becomes

⁷ The reference is taken from Rajan, ed., 35.

⁸ In 'Ezra Pound' (1972) Paz describes his discussion of Pound in *El arco* as 'el primer ensayo crítico en nuestra lengua' dedicated to *The Cantos* (*SyG*, 103-4). Although he translated Canto CXVI into Spanish, Paz remained more impressed by Eliot and concluded that 'Pound no tuvo la suerte de contar, como Eliot, con un Ezra que le aconsejase cortar muchas páginas de los *Cantos*' (*SyG*, 103).

⁹ Paz replicates Augustí Bartra's earlier description of Eliot's conversion in broadly mythical terms: 'Le ha sido [a Eliot] indispensable buscar la salvación en un orden, o mejor, en unas tradiciones culturales que para él significaban un regreso a los orígenes', *Antología de la poesía norteamericana* (México: Colección Letras de México, 1952), p. 448.

increasingly aware that belief in itself is not enough, and that between the pronouncements of André Breton and Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism there are significant differences. Yet, as I have argued, *El laberinto de la soledad* demonstrates that alongside his attachment to the surrealists, Paz also admired the principle of order and the social and religious structures of the colonial period in Mexico. One way through this contradiction would be to engage in a detailed critique of both Eliot and the surrealists in order to arrive at a more intimate understanding of their affinities and divergences. In *El arco y la lira*, however, Paz's dialectical method of argument militates against such detail. Dialectic is inherently polemical: it pushes arguments to opposite poles, and so is incapable of addressing the complex interrelations that often lie between seemingly opposing beliefs.

Paz's discussion of Eliot veers from one assertion to another, but it seems to retreat from, rather than exploit, the implications of its rhetoric. As his description of Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism floats into a suggestive proximity to surrealism, Paz changes tack:

Nostalgia de un orden espiritual, las imágenes y ritmos de *The Waste Land* niegan el principio de la analogía. Su lugar lo ocupa la asociación de ideas, destructora de la unidad de conciencia. La utilización sistemática de este procedimiento es uno de los aciertos más grandes de Eliot. Desaparecido el mundo de valores cristianos – cuyo centro es, justamente, la universal analogía o correspondencia entre tierra, cielo e infierno – no le queda nada al hombre, excepto la asociación fortuita y casual de pensamientos e imágenes. El mundo moderno ha perdido sentido y el testimonio más crudo de esa ausencia de dirección es el automatismo de la asociación de ideas, que no está regido por ningún ritmo cósmico o espiritual, sino por el azar. (*Arco*, 77)

The status of 'nostalgia de un orden espiritual' is ambiguous, partly thanks to the loose appositional syntax that links it to the rest of the sentence. Paz appears to be continuing the general charge of the previous paragraph that Eliot wishes to return to an old spiritual order; yet as his argument unfolds it proposes precisely the opposite. Eliot portrays a sensibility which is definitively severed from any source of spiritual nutriment: 'niegan [sus imágenes y ritmos] el principio de la analogía'. 'Ritmo' is once again a formal characteristic, although it maintains some contact with the mythical sphere since it is an *anti-ritmo* in Paz's more loaded sense; it denies 'analogía'. Eliot is now praised in terms that recall Paz's earlier allegiance to Marxism: one of his 'aciertos más grandes' is the portrayal of a sensibility that is 'destructora de la unidad de

conciencia'. Eliot portrays the crisis of a historical moment: 'el mundo moderno ha perdido sentido'. Yet, although Eliot has been separated from the Christian beliefs that brought him close to the surrealists in the previous paragraph, the beliefs themselves maintain contact with Paz's own 'sagrado extrareligioso'. 'El mundo de valores cristianos' is not an institution so much as a manifestation of 'la universal analogía'. Yet Eliot's denial of this world in favour of 'el automatismo de la asociación de ideas' and 'el azar' also drags him towards surrealist automatic writing and 'azar objetivo'. It is hard to know which of these connections Paz actually wishes to explore since he concludes the paragraph by returning to an assertion that does not square with any of them:

El significado espiritual del poema de Eliot, tanto como su lenguaje, apuntan hacia una forma de salud histórica y moral representada por la iglesia romana y el clasicismo latino. (*ArcoI*, 78)

Paz excised this conclusion from the second edition of *El arco*, yet it is only one of the more conspicuous symptoms of a confusion that is too deep for editing to resolve.

Paz concludes his discussion of Eliot by comparing him with W. B. Yeats. Once again, his habit of working by dialectic forces his argument into inflexible definitions:

En el primero [Yeats] triunfan los valores rítmicos; en el segundo [Eliot] los conceptuales. Uno inventa o resucita mitos, es poeta en el sentido original de la palabra. El otro se sirve de los antiguos mitos para revelar la condición del hombre moderno. (*ArcoI*, 78)

The mythical imagination of the one becomes concept and irony in the other. To the Marxist Paz, Eliot's ironic use of myth was a virtue; it revealed a 'horror ante el mundo moderno'. He now wanted a myth that could answer that world, or 'history' as he often referred to it. Much of the confusion in the pages of *El arco y la lira* that are dedicated to Eliot derives from the shifting status in Paz's own mind of the two terms 'myth' and 'history'. He stood between, on the one hand, a history that he associated with Marxism from which he was now distanced and, on the other, an attachment to the myth of surrealism which was not yet fully tested.

El arco y la lira tends to advocate myth and 'ritmo' over the historical consciousness that Paz had previously favoured. The book's epilogue, however, presents a startling retraction. Paz describes the surrealist effort to create a 'sociedad revolucionaria [...] inseparable de la sociedad fundada en la palabra poética' (*ArcoI*,

233), but then refers to 'el fracaso revolucionario del surrealismo' (*Arco1*, 246). His attempt earlier in the book to view poetry as a 'comienzo absoluto', as the foundation of history, is reversed:

La posibilidad de encarnación de la poesía en la historia está sujeta a una doble condición. En primer término, la desaparición del actual sistema histórico; en segundo, la recuperación de la dimensión divina. (*Arco1*, 258)

Poetry cannot change history until history itself provides favourable conditions. 'La dimensión divina' has been confiscated by organized religion, and the revolution betrayed by authoritarian Marxism. Nevertheless, he maintains the more pessimistic aspect of Marx's vision of history:

La encarnación histórica de la poesía no es, sin embargo, algo que pueda realizarse en nuestro tiempo [...] En cambio, el poema [...] sigue siendo una vía abierta. Puesto que la sociedad está lejos de convertirse en una comunidad poética, en un poema vivo y sin cesar recreándose, la única manera de ser fiel a la poesía es regresar a la obra. La poesía se realiza en el poema y no en la vida. (*Arco1*, 259-60)

Paz has not only retreated from his advocacy of poetic myth as a force for social change, but he also appears to have deserted his earlier admiration of poetry that included history. His attitude suggests, in fact, the *artepurismo* of the Contemporáneos: the poet must now 'regresar a la obra'. Paz's assertion that 'La poesía se realiza en el poema y no en la vida' undermines both the Marxist project, which implied that the inclusion of history in the poem would somehow advance the revolution, and the surrealist attempt to answer historical circumstance with a utopian myth. Paz attempts, at the end of *El arco y la lira*, to escape the conflict between myth and history which informs his discussion of Eliot, and so suggests a possible new reading of the Anglo-American poet which will tally more closely with the members of the Contemporáneos that first translated him.

Manuel Durán blandly describes the pages of *El arco y la lira* dedicated to discussion of T. S. Eliot as 'las más lúcidas y perspicaces de la crítica contemporánea'.¹⁰ I have found more contradiction in Paz's thought than this praise would admit and, like one of the book's first reviewers, I have been unable to 'reducir a un orden lógico el

¹⁰ 'La estética de Octavio Paz', *Revista Mexicana de Literatura*, 8 (1956), p. 132.

pensamiento de Octavio Paz'.¹¹ Yet would a logical order be such a virtue? Anthony Stanton advises that readers shouldn't be surprised if the answers that Paz offers 'sean cambiantes, parciales o incluso incompatibles entre sí [...] Tal vez semejantes resultados sean los únicos posibles en una investigación de esta naturaleza' ('Lectura', 322). The point is well made, but the challenge of Paz's prose discussion does not lie so much in the answers that it arrives at as its means of arriving at them. Sebastião Uchoa Leite, who has given some of the closest critical attention to those means, talks of a 'método poético de desdoblamientos', and observes that in *El arco* 'Paz barroquiza el lenguaje crítico, utilizando la dialéctica de la tesis vs. antítesis, sinonimia vs. antonimia'.¹² 'En Octavio Paz hay permanentemente una duda metodológica implícita en el propio mecanismo verbal de su crítica' (p. 8), he concludes. Leite's analysis is welcome, but it does not necessarily support his conclusion that Paz's dialectical method is a form of doubt. A dialectic places elements at opposite poles. It is thus poorly constructed to account for the grey areas between those poles where identities engage in more complex relations of affinity and difference than its oscillating pattern allows. As I have argued, Paz seems unable to accommodate the nuance of the relation between Eliot's religious and his own pseudo-religious beliefs. The affinities between his surrealist-inspired 'ritmo' and Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism emerge in his rhetoric, nevertheless, in the manner of a troublesome unconscious symptom. But this is precisely the problem. The dialectic is not able to access the symptom's source – the affinity between positions that the habit of thesis and antithesis would separate – and so the reader is bounced from one opposition to another while the undercurrent of Paz's rhetoric hints at connections which his method is unable to explore. There is so little doubt in a method that permits, since it balances thesis against antithesis, a constant sententiousness; and the problem is exacerbated by the clear moral values of good and bad, at source emotional attitudes rather than objective characteristics, that drive the oppositions. Paz's relationship to Eliot was always contradictory. Yet *El arco y la lira*, while it provides evidence of that contradiction, fails to articulate or develop it.

¹¹ Juan José Hernández, 'Octavio Paz: *El arco y la lira*; *Piedra de sol*', *Sur*, 252 (mayo-junio 1958), p. 76.

¹² 'Octavio Paz: el mundo como texto', *Diorama de la Cultura* (supl. de *Excelsior*), 12 marzo 1972, p. 7.

Appendix III: Later Poems

When Paz rejected the connection that Roberto González Echevarría drew between *Piedra de sol* and *The Waste Land*, he described Eliot's poem as 'una extraordinaria máquina verbal que emite significados poéticos por la rotación y el frotamiento de una parte con otra y de todas con el lector' (PC, 21). 'Si hay que comparar algo mío con *The Waste Land*', he continued, 'me parece que habría que pensar en *Homenaje y profanaciones*, *Salamandra*, *Viento entero* o *Blanco*'. *Blanco* (1967) is his most ambitious experiment with the fragmentary form that appears in *The Waste Land*, and which, following Donald Davie, I have traced back to the symbolism of Stéphane Mallarmé.¹ Paz's poem is divided up into columns which can be read in different combinations. Charles Tomlinson describes the structure as 'en gran parte paratáctica, invitando a que la mente dé saltos', and mentions Eliot's own experiment with the form as an analogue: '¡A ver quién puede leer *The Waste Land* pasivamente!'² If Eliot is one possible source for the poem's form, however, its presiding presence is Mallarmé for whom Paz felt 'la atracción, verdadera idolatría' in this period ('Pasos', 57). Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* is a precursor for 'una forma que no encierra un significado sino una forma en busca de significación', what Malcom Bowie describes as 'epistemological view of the poem'.³

¹ The final form of *The Waste Land* was also greatly indebted to Ezra Pound. For an account of his role in the editing of Eliot's poem see Jack Stillinger, 'Pound's *Waste Land*', in his *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 121-38. I have not myself engaged in debate about the authorship of *The Waste Land* because Paz, while aware of Pound's contribution, always attributed the poem to Eliot. The more significant challenge to 'the myth of solitary genius' in terms of the relationship between Paz and Eliot lies in the role of translation.

² *Archivo Blanco*, ed. by Enrico Mario Santi (México: Ediciones El Equilibrista, 1995), pp. 164 & 167. I argued in Chapter One that the translations of Eliot by Enrique Manguía and Ángel Flores both attenuated the syntactic openness of *The Waste Land*, particularly its use of present participles. Paz would have been familiar by 1967 with the English text of Eliot's poem, but a new translation by Homero Aridjis and Betty Ferber, titled 'Tierra baldía', and based on the version by Flores, appeared in Mexico in the *Revista de Bellas Artes*, 1 (enero-febrero 1965), 4-23. Aridjis would appear in Paz's own anthology of twentieth-century Mexican poetry, *Poesía en movimiento* (1966), and his translation systematically registers Eliot's fondness for the present participle, which had been controlled as present simple by both Manguía and Flores: '...los candelabros de siete brazos / Que reflejaban su luz sobre la mesa...' (Flores, 19) – '...Reflejando su luz...' (Aridjis, 8); 'Y animaban los diseños...' (Flores, 19) – 'Agitando el diseño...' (Aridjis, 9); 'Como un taxímetro que espera vibrando...' (Flores, 26) – 'Como un taxi esperando palpitando...' (Aridjis, 12); 'Amigo, la sangre se me agolpa en el corazón' (Flores, 40) – 'Mi amigo, la sangre sacudiendo mi corazón' (Aridjis, 17).

³ Paz, *Poesía en movimiento*, 11; Bowie, *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 119.

In the epilogue that Enrico Mario Santí wrote for his edition of *Blanco*, however, he describes the two poems as ‘en realidad [...] muy distintos’.⁴ He views Mallarmé as ‘una presencia [...] generalizada’ (p. 330). Certainly, Mallarmé’s appearance in the poem’s epigraph – ‘Avec ce seul objet dont le Néant s’honore’ – and the image of a lamp ‘resuelto / en un follaje de claridad’ (*OP*, 486), which echoes the ‘clarté déserte de ma lampe’ of ‘Brise marine’ (*Oeuvres*, 40), suggest a talismanic as much as a structural presence.⁵ Eliot’s *Waste Land*, which Paz cites as a comparable formal example of the poem as a ‘máquina de significaciones’, also appears in images, rather than structure, which are familiar from Paz’s earlier poems:

Río de sangre,
 río de historias
 de sangre,
 río seco:
 boca de manantial
 amordazado
 por la conjuración anónima
 de los huesos,
 por la ceñuda peña de los siglos
 y los minutos... (*OP*, 487-8)

Here are the ‘dried wells’ of *The Waste Land* and a characteristically Pazian-Eliotic association of history as theme with images of aridity. Desert images recur with a ‘paramera abrasada’ (*OP*, 489), and Paz echoes his own Eliotic *Entre la piedra y la flor*: ‘Hay púas invisibles, hay espinas / en los ojos [...] / La rabia es mineral’ (*OP*, 489). As in ‘What the Thunder Said’, the promise of rain ‘in the violet air’ (*CPP*, 73) suggests a possible release:

El cielo se ennegrece
 como esta página.
 Dispersión de cuervos.
 Inminencia de violencias violetas. (*OP*, 490)

Santí describes a ‘suerte de *wasteland* del lenguaje’ in this section (p. 349). It is an imagistic rather than a formal use of Eliot, however. The more challenging use of fragmentary form occurs in the sections made up of two columns, which interperse the Eliotic passages of aridity:

⁴ *El acto de las palabras: estudios y diálogos con Octavio Paz* (México: FCE, 1997), p. 329.

⁵ The epigraph is taken from ‘Ces purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx...’. Paz discusses his own translation of this poem in ‘El soneto en ix’, in *SyG*, 77-94.

Los ríos de tu cuerpo
País de latidos
Entrar en ti

*el río de los cuerpos
astros infusorios reptiles
torrente de cinabrio sonámbulo (OP, 488)*

Here the left hand column implies a direct address to a lover while the right hand column describes analogous sympathies in the world outside. Depending on how the reader chooses to combine the components of this passage (either left to right or up and down), different experiences of connection between intimate and universal relation will be explored. Yet, however one combines these two columns they stand as an erotic and watery resolution of the states of aridity that are expressed in the desert passages. The impulse of Paz's earlier poems to mitigate Eliotic states of disaffection remains, as does the particular form of mitigation that appeared in *Piedra de sol*: the erotic life provides an answer to history.

Malcolm Bowie suggests of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* that 'the poem may be seen as a portrait of thought at risk, an "inscape" of the anxious and intellectually questing mind' (p. 119). The disruptions of Mallarmé's syntax are carefully managed to draw the reader into a construction of meaning which is constantly threatened. Paz divides up the separate passages of *Blanco* and offers the reader different possibilities for finding his or her way through them, but there is little sense of risk in the enterprise since his habitual tendency to think in oppositions where one term (here the erotic) is favoured directs the structure. Although the poem offers the reader an opportunity to relate its components in different combinations, the status of the erotic passages does not change. Paz has written a different type of poem, much closer to certain forms of meditation. The epigraph from Mallarmé is accompanied by a quotation from *The Hevajra Tantra* – 'By passion the world is bound, by passion too it is released' – and in an introductory note he compares the poem to 'un rollo de pinturas y emblemas tántricos', adding that 'se despliega ante nuestros ojos un ritual' (OP, 481). He has ritualized a certain belief in the erotic rather than questioning the way that belief has been constructed.

I described Paz's earlier mitigation of Eliot's scepticism with leftist and then surrealist utopian aspiration as at source a fear of meaninglessness. In 'Los signos en rotación', the epilogue that he attached to the second edition of *El arco y la lira* (1967), Paz contemplated absence of meaning as a prelude to discussion of Mallarmé's work. His essay offers a historical explanation for the lack of vision in contemporary literature:

Las obras del pasado eran réplicas del arquetipo cósmico en el doble sentido de la palabra: copias del mundo universal y respuesta humana al mundo... (*Arco2*, 262)

Technology provides a different method of engagement with the world, however:

Las construcciones de la técnica [...] son absolutamente reales pero no son presencias; no representan: son signos de la acción y no imágenes del mundo. (*Arco2*, 263)

Elsewhere in his prose of this period, Paz regrets this loss of world image. In *Corriente alterna* (1967), he complains that ‘la nueva vanguardia elude cualquier justificación racional o filosófica [...] El pensamiento del surrealismo, crítico y utópico, fue tan importante como las creaciones de sus poetas y pintores’ (*CA*, 169).⁶ In ‘Los signos en rotación’, however, he is prepared to loosen his attachment to a belief that will explain the world. The ‘virtud filosófica’ of ‘la técnica’

consiste, por decirlo así, en su ausencia de filosofía. Tal vez no sea una desgracia: gracias a la técnica el hombre se encuentra, después de miles de años de filosofías y religiones, a la intemperie. (*Arco2*, 265)

Paz’s earliest work was fascinated by the bleak world of ‘la intemperie’ that he found in Villaurrutia and Eliot even as he fled from them to forms of leftist and pseudo-religious assertion. He was also reluctant to accept the *artepurista*, at root symbolist, consciousness of language that accompanied such questions about the foundation of meaning. Heidegger provided a means of contemplating the void in the 1930s, and Paz’s reading of Buddhism in the 1960s with its concept of ‘emptiness’ further persuaded him that a negative vision could be accepted. He is now willing to contemplate questions about language and meaning which had exercised the *artepuristas* and which lay behind Eliot’s experiment. In a startling echo of the *Contemporáneos*, he declares that ‘en poesía la técnica se llama moral’ (*CA*, 72), and continues:⁷

⁶ In ‘La nueva analogía: poesía y tecnología’ (1967), a companion piece to ‘Los signos en rotación’, his insistence that art should represent a world view leads to an attack on modern architecture that wilfully refuses to acknowledge the particular value of its *modus operandi*: ‘¿Qué dicen nuestros hangares, estaciones de ferrocarril, edificios de oficinas, fábricas y monumentos públicos? No dicen: son funciones, no significaciones’ (*SyG*, 11).

⁷ He also echoes Eliot’s assertion that ‘Mallarmé gets his modernity, his sincerity, simply by close attention to the actual writing’ (‘MTP’, 14).

No es poeta aquel que no haya sentido la tentación de destruir el lenguaje o de crear otro, aquel que no haya experimentado la fascinación de la no-significación y la no menos aterradora de la significación indecible. (CA, 74)

He follows the assertion with a new version of the 'between' passage of *The Hollow Men*: 'Entre el grito y el callar, entre el significado que es todos los significados y la ausencia de significación, el poema se levanta' (CA, 74). Paz explores this meditation on language enthusiastically throughout the remainder of his career, culminating in the essay 'Lectura y contemplación' (1983).⁸ It is a substantial and valuable aspect of Paz's later work, and it represents a belated acceptance of the Contemporáneos and their reading of Eliot.

I have argued that the structure of *Blanco* does not call the meaning of its content into question in the manner of *Un Coup de dés*, nor in the manner of *The Waste Land*, which for Conrad Aiken succeeded 'by virtue of its incoherence, not of its plan; by virtue of its ambiguities, not of its explanations'.⁹ Nevertheless, Paz's poem does contain philosophical thinking about language:

El habla
Irreal
Da realidad al silencio
Callar
es un tejido de lenguaje... (OP, 495)

The content of this meditation moves outside the range of Eliot's poem, just as the earlier allusion to 'What the Thunder Said' of 'El cielo se ennegrece' is transposed by Paz to become an observation about the poem - 'como esta página'. Yet the line breaks of 'El habla / Irreal...' notate a particular meditative movement of mind rather than what Bowie describes in Mallarmé as 'the acutest form of metaphysical risk' (p. 128). Both the emotional dramas of implied speakers in *The Waste Land* and the purer philosophical content of *Un Coup de dés* employ syntactic structure and lineation that exploit and disrupt the anticipation of the reader. Paz's poem meditates on metaphysical risk; it does not experience it. In *Blanco*, Paz accepts philosophical questions about the

⁸ As the essay draws to a close Paz alludes once again to *The Hollow Men*: 'Entre el sentido y el sin sentido, entre el decir y el callar, hay un centelleo: un saber sin saber, un comprender sin entender, un hablar mientras se calla. Nos queda oír, en lo que decimos, aquello que callamos. Nos queda la contemplación' (*Sombras*, 46). Eliot had himself referred to the meaning that lies beyond words in 'La música de la poesía': 'Si, como nos enteramos, solamente una parte del significado puede parafrasearse, esto se debe a que el poeta ya está ocupado con los límites de la conciencia, más allá de los cuales las palabras fracasan, aunque el significado aún exista' ('Música', 24).

⁹ Grant, ed., 161.

meaning of language in a poetic form that limits their challenge. It is a less varied and a less dramatic construct than the antecedents with which it claims an affinity, and Santi concedes that although it is 'el poema más ambicioso que ha creado Octavio Paz' it is not 'el más importante' (p. 301).

In his interview with Roberto González Echevarría, Paz compares *Blanco* with *The Waste Land* as an example of a Mallarmean 'máquina verbal que emite significados'. Yet in a discussion of 1964 on the role of silences in the long and short poem, he calls on Eliot's later work:

Más que una escritura son una arquitectura. Ya Mallarmé había comparado *Un coup de dés* a una partitura y Eliot ha llamado a una de sus grandes composiciones: *Four Quartets*. A Cernuda ese poema le parecía lo mejor que había escrito Eliot y varias veces discutimos las razones de esta preferencia, pues yo me inclinaba por *The Waste Land* – que por lo demás, también debe verse como una construcción musical.¹⁰

Although he asserts his preference for Eliot's earlier poem, *Blanco* shares characteristics with *Four Quartets*. Eliot's later poem also called on Mallarmé as a talismanic presence.¹¹ I have argued that Paz's poem replaces the disruptions of an epistemological form that one can trace from *Un Coup de dés* to *The Waste Land* with a more continuous philosophical meditation, a distinction which could be used to describe the transition from Eliot's earlier to his later poem. Eliot also develops a perspective in which the poem can meditate on its own language: 'My words echo / Thus, in your mind'; 'That was a way of putting it – not very satisfactory' (CPP, 171 & 179). *Four Quartets* justifies Paz's own tendency to vitiate the fragmentation of symbolist form with passages that clarify the meaning of the poem. Paz's attempt to impose a controlling structure on *Blanco*, evinced in his description of the left-hand column as 'un poema dividido en cuatro momentos que corresponden a los cuatro elementos tradicionales' (OP, 481), also recalls the association of *Four Quartets* with the four elements: earth, air, water and fire. In *Los hijos del limo* (1974), Paz declared that 'la obra posterior de

¹⁰ 'La palabra edificante: Luis Cernuda' (1964), *Cuadrivio*, 124.

¹¹ 'Garlic and sapphires in the mud / Clot the bedded axle-tree' (CPP, 172) conflates 'bavant boue et rubis' of 'Le Tombeau de Charles Baudelaire' and 'Tonnerre et rubis aux moyeux' of 'M'introduire dans ton histoire...' (*Oeuvres*, 72 & 80). This allusion first appeared in Eliot's 'Lines for an Old Man', which was dedicated to Mallarmé in an early draft (CFQ, 80). 'To purify the dialect of the tribe' (CPP, 194) also modifies 'Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu' of 'Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe' (*Oeuvres*, 71). Hugh Kenner describes *Four Quartets* as 'his [Mallarmé's] most elaborate homage in any language other than his own' (*The Pound Era*, 136). Similarly, I have argued that *Blanco* is a homage to Mallarmé rather than a strictly Mallarmean poem.

Eliot pierde en tensión poética lo que gana en claridad contextual y firmeza de convicciones religiosas' (*Hijos*, 196). While he did not convert to the Anglican church, the desire for 'claridad contextual' was always a characteristic of Paz's own poetry. *Blanco* is Paz's most sustained attempt at the symbolist use of fragmentary form which inspires *The Waste Land*. The influence of *Four Quartets* is apparent, however, in its reflective manner, and becomes more apparent as his career progresses. Its presence is accompanied by a tendency towards autobiographical content, and a relaxation of the conflict between emptiness and assertion that characterizes his earlier use of *The Waste Land*.

‘Cuento de dos jardines’ (1968) refers to two gardens – the one in Mixcoac where Paz grew up, and the other in India where he married his second wife, Marie José. It opens, however, with a broader meditation:

Una casa, un jardín,
no son lugares:
giran, van y vienen.
Sus apariciones
abren en el espacio
otro espacio,
otro tiempo en el tiempo.
Sus eclipses
no son abdicaciones:
nos quemaría
la vivacidad de uno de esos instantes
si durase otro instante. (*OP*, 470)

Henry Gifford, in his introduction to the *Penguin Book of Latin American Verse*, observes that ‘the careful distinctions, the hovering motion, the culminating insight all bring to mind the opening of *Burnt Norton*’ (p. xlv). ‘Cuento de dos jardines’ does not make the same formal claims as *Blanco*, which is divided into columns, but its lineation creates a similarly meditative pattern of thought. The content of this opening passage also recalls *Four Quartets*: the garden of *Burnt Norton*, the ‘moment in and out of time’ of *The Dry Salvages* (CPP, 190), and ‘human kind / Cannot bear very much reality’ (CPP, 172).¹² Gifford concludes that ‘Paz has a richer joy in the “substance of time and

¹² Paz may have remembered this line from its first appearance in *Murder in the Cathedral*, which he had helped to translate (CPP, 271).

its inventions” than Eliot’ (p. xliv), and Charles Tomlinson agrees: ‘what we experience is less an “interpenetration of the timeless with time” than a deepening – often erotic – of the content of time itself’.¹³ Yet in his plans for *The Dry Salvages*, Eliot noted an intention ‘To get beyond time & at the same time deeper into time’ (CFQ, 118), and Helen Gardner in a collection of essays that Paz knew, compared Eliot’s poem to Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: “‘Eternity is in love with the productions of time’”.¹⁴ I am not convinced that Eliot’s ‘moment in and out of time’ is so clearly separable from Paz’s ‘instante’. Eliot’s conception itself depends upon an ambiguity that suits Paz. It provides an idea of epiphany, or momentary utopia, which can claim to offer an escape from historical experience, the kind of grand claim that always appealed to Paz, at the same time as it can deny any outright attachment to a transcendent God-authored scheme. Eliot’s bias towards ‘the *experience* of man in search of God’ [my italics] coincides with Paz’s own search for a form of secular mysticism.¹⁵

The exact status of Paz’s ‘instante’ in relation to Eliot’s ‘moment in and out of time’ is also difficult to assess because the polemical or belief element of ‘Cuento de dos jardines’ is less insistent than in the earlier poems. Paz’s bolder assertions of access to mythical experience are now grounded in the details of a life lived:

Un día,
Como si regresara,
No a mi casa,
Al comienzo del Comienzo,
Llegué a una claridad. (OP, 472)

Along with this new understatement comes humour: ‘Nuestros cuerpos / se hablaron, se juntaron y se fueron. / Nosotros nos fuimos con ellos’ (OP, 474); ‘¡*sunyata*, / plenitud vacía, / vacuidad redonda como tu grupa!’ (OP, 478). The humour arises from a shift of address: Paz is no longer writing for a public about the living conditions of agricultural workers in the Yucatán but talking to his wife about their physical relationship.¹⁶

¹³ ‘Introduction’ to Paz, *Selected Poems*, 13.

¹⁴ Rajan, ed., 71. Ruth Grogan in ‘The Fall into History: Charles Tomlinson and Octavio Paz’ argues the same opposition in favour of Charles Tomlinson and against Paz: ‘Because Paz’s model for the escape from chronometric time is sexual ecstasy, he thinks of time’s transfiguration as an “instant”, something out of time, whereas Tomlinson’s most frequent model for the transfiguration of time is music, an art utterly dependent on the passage of time’, *Comparative Literature*, 44, 2 (1992), p. 152.

¹⁵ Letter to William Force Stead, 9 August 1930; quoted in Schuchard, 151.

¹⁶ Eliot felt that *Four Quartets* lacked personal content: ‘The defect of the whole poem, I feel, is the lack of some acute personal reminiscence (never to be explicated, of course, but to give power from well below the surface)’, letter to John Hayward (5 August 1941); quoted in CFQ, 24. Nevertheless, Eliot did insist on the importance of autobiographical content in the poem. When Hayward queried the significance

Blanco, in a pattern that runs back through and beyond Paz's contact with the surrealists, suggests the erotic as a mitigation of historical conflict. 'Cuento de dos jardines' relaxes the explicit claim of the earlier poems but intensifies the focus on a specific erotic life. Charles Tomlinson described Paz's marriage to Marie José as 'one of the events which has deeply affected' his later work (p. 14), and the combination of philosophical meditation and intimate address in the poem that recounts that marriage is continued into the last works of *Árbol adentro* (1987) such as 'Primero de enero' and 'Como quien oye llover'.

The debates about belief in which Paz's early use of Eliot participated are now less pressing. In 'Cuento' he declares:

Aprendí,
 en la fraternidad de los árboles,
 a reconciliarme,
 no conmigo:
 con lo que me levanta, me sostiene, me deja caer. (*OP*, 474)¹⁷

Reconciliation is distinct from resolution. Paz accepts, as his earlier use of Eliot did not, what is beyond his power. Perhaps he recalled Eliot's definition of Incarnation in the *Four Quartets*:

Here the impossible union
 Of spheres of existence is actual,
 Here the past and future
 Are conquered, and reconciled. (*CPP*, 190)

The specific echo, if such it is, runs in tandem with a more general presence of *Four Quartets* in this autobiographical poetry. The *Quartets* were Eliot's last poetic work, the culmination of a career, and the point at which the compromise of 'reconciliation' has been earned. Paz calls on this Eliot here and in the poem that, if it does not culminate his poetic career, certainly looks back in retrospect over it, *Pasado en claro* (1975).

José Miguel Oviedo describes *Pasado en claro* as the 'most confessional and moving poem that Paz wrote'.¹⁸ It carries an epigraph from Wordsworth's *Prelude* -

of autumn weather in *Burnt Norton*, Eliot replied, "'Autumn weather" only because it *was* autumn weather' (5 August 1941); quoted in *CFQ*, 29.

¹⁷ In his interview with Rita Guibert, Paz acknowledged his continuing relaxation of the meaning that he attached to this experience: 'Recuerdo que le decía a Marie-Jo: "Será difícil que olvidemos las lecciones metafísicas de este jardín." Ahora lo diría de otro modo. ¿Por qué metafísicas? "Será difícil que olvidemos las lecciones de aquel jardín"' (*PC*, 74).

‘Fair seed-time had my soul and I grew up / Foster’d alike by beauty and by fear...’ – which Paz had read in Cambridge in 1970 on Charles Tomlinson’s recommendation.¹⁹ As Anthony Stanton points out, however, *Four Quartets* is also a presence. In all three poems

pasado y presente, origen y destino se confunden en el intento de fijar momentáneamente lo que Wordsworth llamó “spots of time”, lo que Eliot llamó “el punto de intersección de lo eterno y lo temporal... el momento dentro y fuera del tiempo”.²⁰

As in ‘Cuento de dos jardines’, the influence of Eliot’s poem is clearest in the opening passage:

Oídos con el alma,
pasos mentales más que sombras,
sombras del pensamiento más que pasos,
por el camino de ecos
que la memoria inventa y borra:
sin caminar caminan
sobre este ahora, puente
tendido entre una letra y otra.²¹

Paz utilizes a number of components from the opening of *Burnt Norton*:

Footfalls echo in the memory
down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose garden. My words echo
Thus, in your mind. (CPP, 171)

Paz’s ‘pasos mentales’ provide a route into the past that is similar to Eliot’s ‘Footfalls echo in the memory’. Eliot then brings in the reader with ‘My words echo / Thus...’, a choice which Paz avoids, although he accentuates Eliot’s conflation of memory and language with ‘ahora, puente / tendido entre una letra y otra’, and then ‘esta frase, senda

¹⁸ ‘The Passages of Memory: Reading a Poem by Octavio Paz’, in *Octavio Paz: Homage to the Poet*, ed. by Kosrof Chantikian (San Francisco: Kosmos, 1980), p. 199. He cites *Piedra de sol* (1957) as an earlier example of this autobiographical poetry (p. 200). The ‘corredores sin fin de la memoria’ (OP, 262) of *Piedra de sol* may well suggest an early use of *Four Quartets* – ‘Footfalls echo in the memory / Down the passage...’ (CPP, 171) – for this type of poem.

¹⁹ See Tomlinson, ‘Mexican Poet Inspired by Queen Victoria’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 4 June 1989, p. 22.

²⁰ ‘Vida, memoria y escritura en *Pasado en claro*’, in *Tradición y actualidad de la literatura iberoamericana*, ed. by Pamela Bacarisse, 1 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1995), p. 87.

²¹ *Pasado en claro* (México: FCE, 1975), p. 9. I have referred to the first edition of the poem, which is revised in OP.

de piedras...' (*Pasado*, 10). Later, Eliot's garden becomes a 'Patio inconcluso, amenazado / por la escritura y sus incertidumbres' (*Pasado*, 12) and 'Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children, / Hidden excitedly, containing laughter' (*CPP*, 172) becomes 'Cuchicheos: / me espían entre los follajes / de las letras' (*Pasado*, 15). The first line of Paz's poem, 'Oídos con el alma...', itself asserts this journey into the past as primarily linguistic with the Mallarmean strategy of presenting an adjective before the noun that it qualifies.²²

Paz does engage in some implicit debate with the belief-content of Eliot's poem. He modifies the vision in *Burnt Norton* of the empty pool which 'was filled with water out of sunlight' (*CPP*, 172):

Encarnaciones instantáneas:
tarde lavada por la lluvia,
luz recién salida del agua... (*Pasado*, 30)

Paz reverses an illusion of water created by sunlight with a literal experience of real light on real water, which in turn modifies his use of the Eliotic 'encarnaciones' to stress the body rather than the spirit which it embodies.

The world-view of Eliot seems less important, however, than his guiding presence on an autobiographical journey. Yet does Eliot's garden, like Paz's, represent a return to childhood? His memory moves 'down the passage which we did not take / Towards the door we never opened', and he asks, 'Shall we follow / the deception of the thrush?' (*CPP*, 171); 'Human kind / Cannot bear very much reality', the thrush observes (*CPP*, 172). Eliot seems to be warning against the temptation of a past which cannot be reached and which perhaps never was.²³ Paz's own use of the poem as a return to the past may have been suggested by M. H. Abrams' *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), which described both Wordsworth's *Prelude* and Eliot's *Four Quartets* as examples of 'the garden world of peace, innocence, and gaiety of our individual and generic infancy, before the beginning of the adult and fallen man's divided and unhappy consciousness' (p. 319).

Whether Abrams did or didn't guide Paz's reading of *Four Quartets* is not so important as the reading itself, which dates back to 'Cuento de dos jardines', and

²² See the opening of 'Overture ancienne d'Hérodiade': 'Abolie, et son aile affreuse dans les larmes...' (*Oeuvres*, 90).

²³ The second tempter in *Murder in the Cathedral* offers Thomas a return to the past which must be resisted: 'The chancellorship that you resigned / When you were made Archbishop – that was a mistake / On your part – still may be regained' (*CPP*, 248).

possibly earlier to *Piedra de sol*. The biographical reading of *Four Quartets* allows Paz to read his own career through his precursor. He concludes:

Estoy en donde estuve:
voy detrás del murmullo,
pasos dentro de mí, oídos con los ojos,
el murmullo es mental, yo soy mis pasos,
oigo las voces que yo pienso,
las voces que me piensan al pensarlas.
Soy la sombra que arrojan mis palabras. (*Pasado*, 44)

Paz has left his own ‘dudoso jardín de la memoria’ (*Pasado*, 41) behind, and has disappeared into language. Oviedo describes this concluding realization as a ‘defeat’ (p. 205), but as Anthony Stanton points out ‘los versos articulan en sus reiteraciones el necesario punto de partida, superado y trascendido (*aufgehoben*)’ (p. 91). The assumption of the self into language is the precise aim of a poetic autobiography since it declares the point at which the poet is qualified to write. Paz’s conclusion bears the imprint of French structuralism, and in particular Roland Barthes’s ‘La mort de l’auteur’, but also *East Coker*: ‘Every poem an epitaph’ (*CPP*, 197). Eliot oversees this ambivalent moment of graduation as he oversaw Paz’s first published poetry and prose from the pages of *Contemporáneos* in the early 1930s.

Paz’s earlier interest in what precisely Eliot had to say, and the form in which he said it has not disappeared, but it has receded as the author of *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* is transformed from a polemical to a more diffusely located presiding figure. The poems of *Vuelta* (1976) return to the Eliotic desert urban landscapes of Paz’s earlier poems, but his presence is not so easily identified in the last poems of Paz’s career. Paz’s interest continued: according to Anthony Stanton, Paz managed to obtain a copy of Peter Ackroyd’s biography of Eliot as soon as it appeared in 1984, although he was in Mexico at the time, and he devoured it instantly. In *La otra voz* (1990), a continuation of his earlier discussion of Eliot in *El arco y la lira* (1956) and *Los hijos del limo* (1974), his attention has shifted from Eliot the author of *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men*, and then *Four Quartets*, to Eliot the public figure who worked in a bank (*OV*, 116), and influenced literary taste from his office at Faber and Faber (*OV*, 111), a man who didn’t read much in public (*OV*, 77). Eliot is no longer the presence who both accompanied and vexed Paz’s earlier engagements with the *Contemporáneos*, St.-John Perse, Martin

Heidegger, Pablo Neruda, and the surrealists. He is an example of what Paz himself had become, an internationally renowned modern poet.

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